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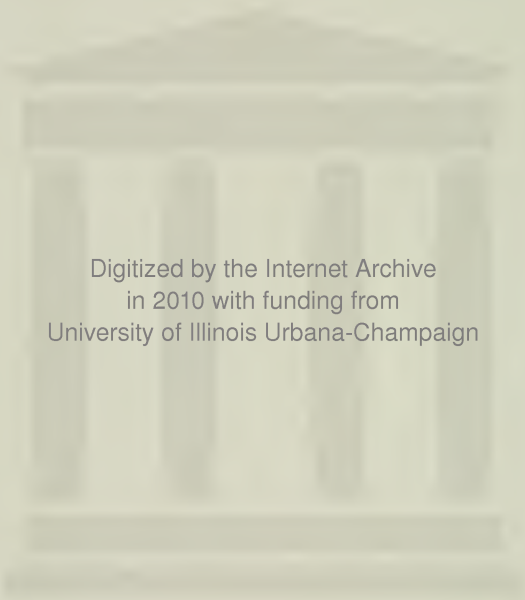
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MARGARET PERCIVAL.

VOL. I.

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MARGARET PERCIVAL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "AMY HERBERT,"

ETC.

EDITED BY THE REV. WILLIAM SEWELL, B.D.

FELLOW AND TUTOR OF EXETER COLLEGE,
OXFORD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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1847.

MARGARET PERCIVAL.

CHAPTER I.

"MARGARET, I came first, please look at my exercise," said a little fretful voice, whilst a slate was thrust forward at the imminent risk of knocking down a well-filled, but rather unsteady, inkstand.

"Hush, Grace, be quiet; you know I can't attend to two at once. This sum is quite wrong. Harriet; very careless!—go to your room, and do it again."

The command was given sharply, and Harriet Percival, a meek child of about eleven years of age, who had been vainly striving for the last half-hour to understand what was meant by "multiplying the second and third terms together, and dividing the product by the first," retired in despair, a few tears falling upon her slate as she left the apartment, and effacing the only figures which did not require correction.

"Now, Grace, let me see," continued Margaret, and she breathed a sigh of relief at the thought of having escaped for the present from the mysteries of the "Rule of Three." Grace leant over the back of her sister's chair, and began playing with her watch-chain; but a sudden jerk, and an exclamation of impatience, recalled her to order.

"Look, just look, Margaret, Philip has made such a great blot," she whispered.

Margaret threw down the exercise, and going up to the child took the pen out of his hand, and signed to him to go into the corner. But Philip had a will of his own — a very strong one — and on the present occasion it urged him to remain where he was. Margaret ordered, but equally in vain; she even proceeded to take hold of him, but her hand was delicate, and her strength slight. Philip was capable of making a very fair resistance, and a passionate burst of tears with some desperate struggles succeeded, during which Grace amused herself by entangling her sister's netting silk, and scribbling on the cover of an atlas. Margaret felt herself acting a very undignified part, but she had no choice; and, besides, her temper was roused, and she was resolved to gain the victory. Philip was at length captured; his arms were put behind him, and tied together, and he was lifted up on a chair in the middle of the room as a public warning.

Margaret had not even time to smooth her collar and arrange her hair, and her cheek was still flushed and her eye sparkling, when the door opened, and a tall, very elegant girl, apparently about nineteen, entered. That they were sisters might be seen at once; the family likeness was strongly marked; but Margaret's figure was scarcely of the middle height, and her dark complexion and rather foreign-looking features formed a strong contrast to Agatha's transparent skin, and fair hair. It was strange after a minute's comparison that any resemblance should be traced between them; but there was an expression — a curl of the lip, a turn of the head, which could not be mistaken. It was the Percival manner, the stock upon which all other differences had been grafted.

"Why are the children so noisy?" enquired Agatha, in a reproachful tone; "really, Margaret, you ought to know better than to allow them to be so troublesome."

Margaret looked up sarcastically. "Perhaps," she said, "you will do me the favour to assist in keeping order."

It did not appear that the observation was heeded, for Agatha put up her eye-glass, and gazed round the room in search of a book; and when it was found, took it and retired without offering another word. A cloud passed over Margaret's brow; but it was not from ill-temper: it was from weariness and self-discontent. There was a book lying before her, and, though Grace's exercise remained uncorrected, and Philip, in a subdued voice, asked to be forgiven, she threw herself back in her chair, and, yielding to a train of thought, suggested by the words which met her eye, gave herself up to the luxury of fancy. It required but a short reverie, the exercise of a faculty constantly exerted, and Margaret was in a new world. How different was it from the world in which she lived! How pure and noble even in its scenes of trial — how raised above the reach of petty sufferings — how blest in its recollections of the past—how bright in its anticipations of the future! It was earth—but earth exalted and refined; once more a garden of Eden, a paradise where the peacefulness of nature was but the type of the harmony of the spirits who inhabited it. Margaret's heart thrilled within her — she had not yet reached the age when hope and imagination are crushed by life's weight of care; she knew that it was a dream, but it was her refreshment, her repose, and she felt no hesitation in indulging it. Harriet's voice was the first to break the spell.

"Margaret, I have tried so very much, it will not come right."

Margaret's exclamation was little suited to the ideal world in which she had been dwelling. The little girl's slate was hastily scanned ; a long line was drawn across it nearly from the commencement of the sum ; and, without further explanation, she was again sent to her room.

"Shall we put the books away now, Margaret?" said Grace, covering the tangled netting silk with her hand.

"Yes, directly. Be quick ; the servants will be here to lay the cloth in a minute. Philip, you may get down : I shall give you a black mark."

Margaret wrote a large, awful looking B against Philip's name in the conduct book, and then, untying his hands, bade him go up-stairs and make himself tidy before dinner.

Grace busied herself in clearing the table, and in so doing left the silk open to inspection.

"Oh, Grace ! you naughty, very naughty child !" was Margaret's exclamation, as she discovered the difficulty in which the little girl's mischievous habits had placed her. "I shall speak to mamma, really I shall : I never knew any one so tiresome."

Grace did not appear much overcome by this threat ; she was her mother's favourite, and she knew that she could easily make her story good against any thing which her sister might tell. "Mamma is coming," she said archly, and in a tone of defiance.

Margaret gathered up the silk, and, holding it up to view, addressed her mother, when she came in, with a series of complaints. Not in the affair of the silk merely was Grace in fault, but in every thing. Exercise, reading, lessons, music, all had

been badly done; she was more trouble than all the rest; she was trying, quite trying.

"Hush, hush, my dear, command yourself, you are so excitable. What is it, Grace? what have you been doing?"

Grace threw her arm coaxingly around her mamma, and pointed to the silk. "It is only that, mamma. But you know she is cross."

"Well, don't be teazing, there's a good child. Margaret, my love, you must learn to be more forbearing: you can't expect such little things to be perfect."

Mrs. Percival delivered the injunction in an oracular tone, and when Margaret disappeared, hopeless of justice, and vexed with herself for having attempted to obtain it, she kissed Grace and called her a darling, and, without taking any more notice of what had passed, rang the bell to reprimand the servant for being ten minutes after time in preparing the children's dinner.

Mrs. Percival was emphatically a good manager; good in the worldly sense of the term. She was the wife of a physician, high in practice, and with an income yearly increasing. She was a lady by birth and education; and she was a lady also in mind, as far as understanding and scrupulously acting upon the acknowledged tenets and practices of the world could constitute her such. She never omitted a civility, or was guilty of any breach of etiquette. She dressed always in good taste; her house was furnished elegantly, without pretension; her children were neat and interesting; her servants were patterns of punctuality; or, if they were not, they were discharged. She was busy, constantly; morning, noon, and night, her eye was on the watch to perceive and correct defects; and if this perpetual interference partook of the nature

of a petty tyranny, it was a fault known only to her family. She was too well bred to obtrude her domestic grievances upon her friends; and, no one seeing any thing of the machinery by which so perfect an establishment was regulated, Mrs. Percival's household was universally held up as a pattern for imitation in the town of Staunton and the adjoining neighbourhood. And Mrs. Percival was not an unamiable woman; she had a kind heart, and never turned aside from any cases of distress. She did not trouble herself to seek them out; that was the duty of the rector and the curate, and the district visitors; and when they were found, she did not exert herself to make personal enquiries; but her purse was always open to those who applied to her for relief. She was liberal by nature and habit, and to give was far more easy than to refuse. Of these points of character Mrs. Percival was fully conscious; yet she was not what would be called conceited. She did not in general over estimate her judgment and common sense, nor believe herself a pattern of benevolence. Her self-confidence was merely that which enabled her to decide quickly for her own family, and authoritatively for others. But there was one thing on which she prided herself—a plan for the education of her children. She had persuaded her husband to lavish upon her eldest girl every advantage which the demands of modern refinement might require. Agatha was sent to an expensive school, and allowed masters for drawing, and singing, the piano, the harp, French, Italian, German, mathematics: there was nothing that any one of her acquaintance had ever learnt which Agatha Percival did not learn also. It was an outlay at first, but it was to be amply repaid in the end; for when her education was

finished, Agatha was to return to be the instructress of the remainder of the family.

No scheme could have been devised more prudently; but, unhappily for its success, Mrs. Percival never made any enquiries into that very essential requisite, Agatha's own qualifications. Agatha had learnt, and of course she must be able to teach. And Agatha had indeed learnt, and not superficially. She was well read, a fair linguist, an excellent musician; her good natural abilities had been carefully cultivated, and at eighteen she was considered not merely elegant and beautiful, but a very superior person in mind. Mrs. Percival was proud of her daughter, and her husband was still more so. He was engrossed in his profession, engaged without a single day of entire rest; and, with such constant and harassing occupations, his life would have been irksome beyond endurance but for his delight in his family. Although there were few hours in which he could enjoy their society, and those liable to frequent interruption, yet the stolen intervals were full of refreshment to his wearied spirits; and to hear that Agatha had been called lovely, or that Philip had been thought a fine little fellow, or indeed that praise had been bestowed upon any one of his children, gave him strength to endure all fatigue, whether mental or physical. He agreed entirely with his wife in believing that Agatha was more than competent to take charge of her brothers and sisters. Margaret, who was then seventeen, would, it was imagined, require but little attention. She was uncommonly clever, and had profited wonderfully by country masters; and a little advice, a few hints, would be all that could be necessary for her. As to her mind, Margaret had managed, no one knew how, to read, and think, and study by herself, so as almost to rival Agatha in

some persons' opinion. As a child her mother had taught her, as she did all the rest; but from the age of fourteen, Margaret had outstripped her teacher. She read history and made notes; she dived into the mysteries of Dante, and spent her leisure hours in mastering the difficulties of German; she was even occasionally seen with a Latin Testament in her hand; and though her father laughed at her, and called her a smatterer and a blue-stocking, and her mother wished that she would pay a little more attention to work; still, both were in their hearts well pleased. Margaret was no common character, and it was possible that she might some day excite as much admiration by her learning as Agatha did by her beauty and showy accomplishments. Agatha's instructions, therefore, would not be required by her; and there were two sons, one in the army and another at Eton, who were equally beyond the need of home-tuition; but Harriet, and Grace, and Philip, and little Juliet, when she was old enough, might be expected to make rapid progress. Agatha heard of the plan, and offered no objection to it. It was not worth while when it was only an idea, and might, like many other of her mother's projects, come to nothing; but when, on the morning after she had finally left school, Mrs. Percival addressed her with—

"Well! my dear, when do you intend to begin? I suppose you will require about a week to make arrangements, and then you can take possession of the school-room"—

her declaration, that she had neither the power nor the inclination to undertake the office assigned her, was made so decidedly, that even Mrs. Percival's will was obliged in a degree to give way. She insisted, entreated, threatened; but she did not

know the character with which she had to deal. Agatha Percival was weak and vacillating in principle, but obstinate to immovability. She had quickness of intellect, but no depth; her temper was considered good, because her feelings were not easily roused; and the system under which she had been educated had rendered her selfish, by teaching her that she was to be the centre of admiration. Hers was a disposition which nothing but high religious motives would ever have stimulated to real energy and usefulness, and, instead of religion, she had heard only of the world,—what would be said and thought—what was considered etiquette—what was the general fashion;—she had not an idea beyond. The vain dream of this mortal life was to her a vivid reality; and the one object of her existence, for which every other consideration was to be sacrificed, was a fortunate marriage, including, of course, a handsome house and establishment of servants and carriages; rank superior to her own; money to gratify every wish; and, as the last desideratum, a husband. With such views it was hopeless to talk to her of the value of time, the necessity of employing her talents, the advantages that might accrue to herself, as well as to her sisters, from the plan proposed. To spend her days in the school-room would be banishment from all that could give her happiness; her home would be a prison, her life a burden;—she was excited even to eloquence upon the occasion, and Mrs. Percival shrank back, alarmed at the unexpected torrent of words she had encountered from her usually quiet daughter. In great disappointment she consented to waive the question till Dr. Percival's return home, and Agatha resumed her book as placidly as if nothing had occurred; whilst Mrs. Percival, vexed and indignant, proceeded to the school-room, to fulfil herself the task which she had

so unsuccessfully endeavoured to devolve upon another. Dr. Percival's surprise at the refusal was not as great as his wife's. The project had never made much impression upon him; and as long as his children were educated, he cared little by whom.

"Well, my love, well!" he said, stroking his chin complacently, when Mrs. Percival had finished her recital of the morning scene; "I have no doubt you are right; you must know best; a great pity, certainly, it is, but natural,—very natural. Agatha doesn't like teaching, so don't a great many people."

"But, my dear Dr. Percival, after her education, —after the sums of money we have spent,—so ungrateful it is!"

"He—hem; no, not ungrateful exactly; she doesn't like it, that's all."

"Not like it!—to be sure she does not; but that is what I say, that Agatha is extremely ungrateful."

"Harsh, my dear; you should remember what you felt when you were young."

Yes, indeed, I do remember what I felt. I was made to do every thing in the house—a perfect slave. Agatha's life, if she had twenty children to teach, would be Paradise to what mine was."

"Well, it may be; we will hope it will be so."

Dr. Percival poured out a glass of wine, held it up to the light, sipped it with evident zest, and then threw himself back in his chair, preparatory to a nap.

"Now, Dr. Percival, indeed you must listen. What are we to do? Are you prepared to pay a hundred a year to a governess,—and masters besides?"

Dr. Percival roused himself and smiled; and the smile upset the remainder of his wife's equanimity.

"Really you are most provoking; you tell me every day that we are living too expensively, that

you must put by something for your girls; and yet, you would give a hundred a year to suit Agatha's whims, and only smile about it."

"You mistake me, my dear; I would not give a hundred a year."

"Then what would you give?—what would you do? How are we to manage?"

"As we have done before," was the quiet answer.

"But, indeed, I assure you, Dr. Percival, this is not a subject upon which you are competent to judge. How can I possibly continue to bear such a burden? I have not been at all well lately, I am not in the least equal to it; and, you know, when we parted with the nursery governess, and sent Agatha to the Miss Robinsons', it was with the full belief that I should only be obliged to teach the younger ones for two or three years. It is hard upon me,—very hard."

Mrs. Percival's temper was in general good, and her husband was surprised at the tone in which the last words were said.

"Julia, my dear, you vex me; no one dreams of being hard upon you; but as to giving an additional hundred a year to a governess, it is out of the question. You know Craven costs me three hundred at least, and there is George nearly ready to go to college; and if any thing were to happen to me, what is to become of you all?—you must think of this!"

"But I do think of it," exclaimed Mrs. Percival, fretted beyond patience by her husband's seeming dulness of comprehension; "all that I want is, for you to think of it too, and to insist upon Agatha's doing her duty."

"Nay, my dear, if Agatha has such a disinclination, it will not be her duty; she will not be fitted for it."

Mrs. Percival sighed, not in grief, but in irritation. She bit her lip, and walked quickly up and down the room. Dr. Percival was not as obtuse as he appeared; he was revolving in his own mind some means of obviating the difficulty; and, after a silence of considerable length, during which Mrs. Percival's step had quickened, and a few ejaculations had escaped her, he said—

"You have another daughter, my dear; why cannot she be the governess?"

"Nonsense! absurdity!" were the first expressions which rose in Mrs. Percival's mind, but they were not uttered. She had a peculiar dislike to any thing approaching to a matrimonial quarrel, and was aware that she had during the last quarter of an hour been nearly on the brink of one. Dr Percival repeated his question, adding—

"Margaret is seventeen, I think."

"Yes, within a month; she is much too young."

"Only a year younger than Agatha, and she has the power."

"Yes," and Mrs. Percival's countenance brightened; "no one can doubt that. Signor Contarino showed me some Italian poetry of hers yesterday, which he said was wonderful, and he must be a good judge."

"Of course; and she spoke French fluently when Monsieur de Roget dined here; and her music and drawing are very good, though not equal to Agatha's."

"Not quite," said Mrs. Percival; "but we must recollect the year's difference."

"She is extremely young, certainly; but she is very steady."

"Well, then, I suppose it is settled; so I shall have my nap." And Dr. Percival once more composed himself in his chair.

"Settled, my dear!" exclaimed his wife; "no, it is not at all settled. I am not in the least sure that it will do; and Margaret may be like Agatha."

"Ask her—ask her," was muttered drowsily; and Mrs. Percival, seeing no hope of continuing the conversation, retired to her chamber; and, after a quarter of an hour's deliberation, sent for Margaret. Margaret was lost in the delights of Schiller's Wallenstein, and not at all inclined to put aside her book for the prospect of a business conversation with her mother; most probably upon some omission or commission, of which, in her abstraction of mind, she had been guilty. But Mrs. Percival's face was not critical as usual; she was rather in the conciliatory mood, and making Margaret sit down, she addressed her with—

"Margaret, my love, your papa and I have been talking; we think you are growing rather too old for the school-room, and you have done very well lately,—extremely well. Signor Contarino assures me that he is excessively pleased with you."

Margaret could scarcely believe that she heard correctly,—so new a thing was it for her to be praised.

"Agatha's return I thought would have made a difference to me," continued Mrs. Percival; "but she has disappointed me. I am very vexed with her indeed. She is acting an ungrateful part. However, your father does not think it right to urge the point; so we must let it rest. Agatha does not choose to teach the younger ones, and we have been considering—do you think it possible, my dear Margaret, that you could undertake to do it?"

"Me, mamma! me! you are laughing."

"No, my love, I am not. You are young, I know; but, as I said before, you have done very well lately; and I think you must be competent.

History, and geography, and all those things, I can judge myself that you understand; and French too; and I dare say you could help the little ones in music and drawing; they don't require much yet, and by the time they do you will have improved yourself."

Margaret did not know what to reply. Conceited she was not,—she was too really clever, too conscious of the extent of knowledge which lay before her, and which she could never hope even to attempt to grasp. Perhaps, she had not enough self-confidence, for she had been very little accustomed to approbation, from being generally placed in comparison with Agatha; and her estimation of her own powers amounted to a certainty that she was a very bad workwoman, and not at all useful in exercising her fingers, even in the tying up of a parcel; and a notion that it was rather easier to her to remember what she had read, and more agreeable to study the grammar of a foreign language, than it was to the generality of her acquaintances. Mrs. Percival waited with some degree of anxiety. Margaret's refusal would throw her again into difficulty, but she was not prepared for the answer:

"Mamma, may I have time to think about it?"

It seemed unlike Margaret; rapid and energetic, and so frequently acting upon impulse. But Margaret's mind was of a nature which Mrs. Percival could not comprehend. She was quick in expressing her opinions, merely because they were seldom to be followed by action; and her impulses, the result of a highly imaginative temperament, were, in the same way, often unguarded, simply because she had never been required to check them by considering that they involved consequences of importance. This was the first occasion on which she had had to judge for herself; and her good sense, a quality

which few as yet had given her credit for possessing, urged her at once to pause before she decided. Mrs. Percival, though impatient, could not find fault with the delay; and Margaret spent the next half-hour in considering the reasons for and against the proposed plan, more deeply and thoughtfully than would have been done by many of mature age. The result was in accordance with her mother's wishes. Margaret consented to take Agatha's duty upon herself; and Mrs. Percival, delighted at the arrangement, believed that it was entirely owing to herself; whilst her husband, saved from the labour of thinking, and desiring domestic peace at any price, felt that he could scarcely lavish sufficient caresses upon his daughter, for having spared him the renewal of the afternoon's conversation. Agatha, too, was grateful; she saw that her sister had saved her not merely from a wearying occupation, but from an altercation with her parents of a serious nature; and, in the good humour of the moment, she willingly promised to lend her occasional assistance, though she did not choose to take the entire responsibility. It was a peaceful, happy household, and Margaret was the happiest of all. Her Dante and Schiller were thrown aside; her drawings were put away, almost without regret. She had but one thought—that of setting an example of perfect education. But just emerged from childhood, she had a vivid remembrance of all that she had endured, and a clear perception of the mistakes by which she had been injured. She had particularly watched, within the last two years, the fatal fruits of her mother's system of management. Her constant interference, and complaints; her irritable manner, when she was not really angry; her uninteresting, matter-of-fact style of instruction; and, above all, the petty, gossiping, worldly

tone which was infused into the children's minds by the conversation, or frequently by the remarks only, which were made in their presence. Margaret saw that Harriet's meekness was repelled, and her indolence overlooked; that Grace was made forward and pettish; that Philip was becoming every day more headstrong. A fault there must be somewhere,—a grievous one. Margaret did not set to work to discover where it lay, but she painted in fancy a school-room, in which the teacher was to be infallible, and the pupils were to be patterns of docility; and, setting herself to make rules, and chalk out plans of instruction, she threw the whole energy of her mind into the business before her, and entered upon the duties of her new office.

Twelve months had gone by. Margaret was eighteen, about to be introduced into society. Agatha was already the gayest of the gay,—admired by all, courted by many. Mrs. Percival was perfectly satisfied with the sensation she had caused; and Margaret was to follow,—not the same course, that could not be expected, for few were gifted like Agatha,—but one as successful in a different way. Yet Margaret herself had but few thoughts to give to the subject; she was weary, disappointed, heartsick; her Utopian schemes had failed—her hopes were gone. Because all was not perfect at once, she had given up the endeavour to make it so; and, in consequence, the school-room was a scene of irritability and contention. She had gained no apparent influence; the children had made little progress, except in the mere routine of learning; her mother scolded, Agatha laughed; her father gave her hints upon the government of her temper, which she was painfully conscious of deserving,

and her home was wretched. Society, be it what it might, could bring no cure to ills like these. And Margaret had grown in mind even as she had grown in years. Her principles were still unsettled, and her temper was unsubdued, and her heart was wayward and discontented; but the yearnings of a slumbering spirit were awakening within her — the yearnings which can never be satisfied by aught that this world can give. It is a season of overpowering awe when the perception of the infinite realities which lie around us first dawns upon our minds; but there is a perception more overwhelming, because more hopeless, which precedes it — the sense of the nothingness of existence. Margaret had attained the one, but she had not yet reached forward to the other. Life, — its hopes and its fears, — its sorrows and its joys, — what was it? What was its end, its object? Why should there be contention and strife, ambition and rivalry, the desire of glory, and the dread of shame? One end there was to man — one event which happeneth to all: each alike must go unto one place, since "all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." The thought was not that of scepticism. Margaret knew and believed with the belief of the understanding in a better, a "more enduring inheritance;" but she had not yet learned to connect the present and the future, to invest the meanness of this world with the splendour of heaven; and when she looked onward through the long vista of years to the world beyond the grave, it seemed to her an isolated star glittering in darkness, and not the glorious termination of that path of the just, entered upon at the commencement of our Christian course, which is "as the shining light, and shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

But it was not in Margaret's nature, nor is it often in the nature of any in the spring-time of life, to acquiesce contentedly in a state of despondency. The world without could give her no comfort, but the world within was still open to her enjoyment. Reality (or what she believed to be reality) was irksome and insipid; but imagination was exciting, and, for the moment, satisfying. Margaret created for herself a vision of beauty and perfection. In fancy she formed a home for her restless wishes, and peopled it with beings innocent and noble and intellectual; and in that home she dwelt, the centre of all admiration, the one object whom all were to idolise and obey. Could it excite wonder if the business of life thus became daily more distasteful, if the duties which she had engaged to fulfil were less carefully performed, or if the opiate with which she lulled her exhausted spirits only served to increase tenfold the disease?

Margaret Percival little knew her own danger; and when her mother called her a visionary, and Agatha smiled in ridicule at her abstraction, she believed that they were speaking in ignorance; and only found the more solace in the ideal world, where no thought or word was at variance with her taste or her feelings. And her mother and sister did speak in ignorance. They had no knowledge of the malady, and judged only by the symptoms. If Margaret had been commonly attentive to her daily occupations, joined in an occasional gossip, and expressed herself delighted at the prospect of a ball, she might have indulged her imagination for ever, and no one would have found fault with her. Mrs. Percival's fear was, lest her daughter should despise the forms of society, or, by shutting herself up in seclusion, become an object of neglect.

The real danger was, lest Margaret should spend her life, her short day of trial, and preparation for eternity, in a delusive fancy; and be awakened only when repentance should be of no avail, to the miserable consciousness that she had been dreaming of — not practising — goodness.

CHAPTER II.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn's carriage will be here soon, my dear Agatha; are you nearly ready?" said Mrs. Percival, as she knocked at the door of her daughter's chamber, on the day succeeding our introduction to the school-room.

"Ready, mamma, in one minute. Just tell me, please, if my shawl is straight."

Mrs. Percival willingly performed the office of a lady's maid, for it gave her an opportunity of admiring her daughter's graceful figure and elegant dress. "Really, my love, I must say you manage to make yourself look extremely nice. Where are you going to-day?"

"I don't know exactly: — into the town first, for a little shopping; and then I rather think to Ashington Court; Mrs. St. Aubyn wants to show me her brother's place."

"Ah! the poor Colonel! it has come to him too late, I am afraid; he will never enjoy it."

"But, mamma, why not? he is not so old."

"No, not above fifty; but he should have had it younger, and then he might have married and been happy."

Agatha laughed. "Well! he may marry now: stranger things have happened; and I know his sister wishes it."

"Yes, his not marrying can make no difference to her, as the property always goes in the male line."

"What a curious, disagreeable arrangement it is,"

said Agatha; "I am glad I am not one of the Clives: so, good bye, dear mamma; there is the carriage just driving up.

Mrs. Percival went to the window. Mrs. St. Aubyn's pony phaeton was at the front door, and Mrs. St. Aubyn herself, a lady-like but vapid looking person, dressed in the perfection of the fashion, was bending forward as if impatient for Agatha's appearance.

Mrs. Percival withdrew immediately; she would not for the world have been seen. "My kind regards to Mrs. St. Aubyn, my love. I hope she will bring you home in time; remember we are engaged out to dinner."

Agatha ran down stairs, and, after a short delay, the carriage drove off. Mrs. Percival listened to the sound of the receding wheels with a smile of satisfaction. The intimacy with Mrs. St. Aubyn had been a peculiar aim of her ambition; not because either profit or amusement was to be derived from the acquaintance, but because, in the little world of Staunton, Mrs. St. Aubyn's family was more highly connected than any other; and she herself, though devoid of attractions either personal or mental, had, by a system of exclusiveness, contrived to render her society eagerly and generally coveted. The privileged circle which constituted the "haut ton" in the vicinity of Staunton was, as is the case in many country places, difficult of access; but Dr. Percival's position was, like his house, in the border country. He was of an old family, and one that was much respected: it had been the custom from time immemorial for the Percivals to visit every where; and even when in the commencement of his practice Dr. Percival had taken up his abode in a small house in the principal street in Staunton, his dignity as a phy-

sician, and the universal tradition of society, gave him admission to houses which would have been hermetically sealed against persons of much greater pretension. But in process of time, as his practice increased, Dr. Percival removed from the three-storied house, with its back and front parlours, and its two small drawing-rooms, one of which had been converted into a bed-room, to serve the needs of his family, into another dwelling of a very different description. The Grove was a low, red-brick edifice, having stone facings and mullioned windows, and occupying a considerable extent of ground. It was not a handsome house, and, though at some little distance from the town, commanded no view, except over some meadow land, and the adjacent village and church of Deering. But it was a mansion of much respectability, owning a pretty shrubbery, a large garden, and a paddock; and sheltered on the north and east by some fine old elms, from which its name had been derived. The interior was of the same description; good-sized rooms, rather dark, but capable of affording much comfort, especially in the winter evenings, when the thick crimson curtains in the drawing-room were closely drawn, the sofa wheeled near the blazing fire, the table covered with books, the piano opened and the harp uncovered, and the bright lamp lighting up the oak wainscot and throwing an air of cheerfulness over the most distant corner of the apartment. When Dr. Percival removed to the Grove, his celebrity was well established; and, satisfied in the certainty, as he believed, of being able to provide comfortably for his large family, he shook off all cares except those connected with his profession, and resolved that the remainder of his life should be happy. And it was happy as far as outward prosperity could render it so; and for inward anx-

ieties Dr. Percival had no time. It certainly was very gratifying to a father's pride to know that his children were fitted by their talents, manners, and accomplishments, for the first society in the land; and the pleasure which he derived from the invitations and the applauses that followed Agatha's introduction into the world was unbounded. Yet neither Dr. Percival nor his wife would have gone aside to seek for society beyond their natural sphere; though when it was forced upon them they entered into it willingly. And who could blame them? Who could even think of danger in such a position, except those who know the imperceptible degrees by which we slide from acquiescence in enjoyment into the craving for its possession; or by which, when, in conformity with custom, we bow down before the idols of the world, rank, and wealth, and fashion, we at last pay them the homage of the heart, and suffer them to usurp that sway over our actions which belongs to God alone? In the opinion of their friends, Dr. and Mrs. Percival led innocent and useful, even virtuous, lives; and few who had witnessed the glow of maternal pride, which passed over Mrs. Percival's countenance as she pictured her daughter driving through Staunton, the chosen companion of the elegant Mrs. St. Aubyn, would have thought it necessary to ask whether a friendship, or even an intimacy, based upon the vain desire of exciting envy and admiration, could possibly be worthy the ambition of a Christian.

But Mrs. Percival's complacent equanimity was soon ruffled. A visit to the school-room roused, as it generally did, every latent feeling of irritation. The apartment was a picture of disorder; the books which had been used were scattered on the table and the floor in wild confusion; the inkstand had been upset upon the carpet, a stool over-

turned was lying with its face to the ground, Grace was in the corner, Philip was sobbing, and Harriet reading out in a rapid inaudible voice to Margaret, who, reclining in her chair, was turning over the pages of a novel. Mrs. Percival's movements were energetic. Grace was called up, slightly reprimanded and forgiven; Harriet and Philip were summoned from their employments to put the room in order; and Margaret received a reproof for neglect, given before her pupils and couched in no very gentle terms. It was an unfortunate forgetfulness, or it might have been ignorance, on Mrs. Percival's part, which caused her to overlook the fact that the best mode of ensuring respect for another is by exhibiting it in our own conduct. She wished her children to look up to Margaret and obey her; but she took the most effectual steps towards rendering her authority utterly nugatory. Margaret felt this keenly. It did her harm, by inducing her to believe that nearly all the defects which she lamented in the present system of education were ascribable to her mother's interference.

"What can be done whilst Grace is so spoilt?" was an excuse constantly made to herself; and, even in cases with which Mrs. Percival had no concern, Margaret had always an apology at hand. It was hopeless to attempt any thing unless she had full control. If she were to form good plans one day, they might all be destroyed the next. On this occasion, however, she had some doubt whether she was entirely blameless, and the novel was pushed aside from shame.

"This will never do, Margaret," was Mrs. Percival's conclusion of her angry remonstrance: "Your father and I must adopt some other plan, if this is to be the mode of instruction."

Margaret could have replied with equal irritation;

but, though her temper was not good, she was never wanting in filial respect,— at least in words.

She said something in a low tone about sorrow and tiresome children, and then recalling Harriet, who had succeeded in making the room look neat, told her to go on reading. But her troubles were not ended. Mrs. Percival wished to make some inquiries about Harriet's studies: she thought the book too old for her; Harriet was not clever, and it was not well to force her mind. The observation was made, and supposed to be forgotten; but it was carefully treasured up by the little girl about whom it was spoken; and many times afterwards, in seasons of despondency or indolence, it recurred to crush her energy, or foster her natural defect. Margaret, in theory, understood her sister's character tolerably well, and felt directly that her mother gave an opinion without knowledge or consideration: but remonstrance would have been useless. The history was put aside, and another substituted; though Harriet, in an entreating voice, stated that she had only just finished it, and had been allowed to begin the new one two days before as a reward.

"It does not signify, my love; I don't choose to be argued against: she will read this, Margaret, over again. A year hence will be quite soon enough for Rollin. If it were Grace, it would be different."

Grace heard as quickly as Harriet; and bridled her neck, and smiled; her memory, too, was good for all observations made about herself.

"And now, my dear," said Mrs. Percival, soothingly, "I have only one more thing to say. I do hope you won't keep the carriage waiting this evening: it worries your father excessively."

"The carriage, mamma!" repeated Margaret.

"Yes, my dear, the carriage. How sadly forgetful you are! We dine at the parsonage this evening."

"Oh! I remember now—but must I really go?"

"You are provoking, Margaret; of course you must. The invitation has been accepted."

"But I said at the time I did not wish it," replied Margaret.

"Nonsense, my love; I won't hear of these fancies; why should your father and I give ourselves the trouble of going out, and asking people here in return, if it were not for you and Agatha? At our age it would be much more comfortable to be quiet."

"Agatha likes it," said Margaret.

"And so must you, my dear. I will never believe, in fact, but that you do; it is not natural."

"The parsonage is so very dull," sighed Margaret.

"Well, so it is; there is no doubt of that: but we must take invitations as they come." The Stanleys are excellent people; and you know it is quite right to pay respect to one's clergyman."

"The dinners are so long," sighed Margaret again.

"Very long, and badly sent up; which I wonder at, for I know they always have a cook when they give a dinner party; but Mrs. Stanley, as a girl, never did know any thing of management."

"And they have such a tiresome set of people always," continued Margaret.

"That is the same fault; bad management and short invitations, so that they have no time to choose. But it will be better to-day: we shall have Mrs. St. Aubyn and Colonel Clive."

Margaret's smile was very satirical.

"You may look, my dear; I know what you

mean, but you are mistaken indeed. Mrs. St. Aubyn has a great deal of sense when you come to talk to her; and the Colonel must know a good deal, he has been abroad so much."

"Possibly," said Margaret, while the same smile played on her lips; "but they are Agatha's friends, not mine."

"Your own fault, Margaret; Mrs. St. Aubyn admires you extremely. She said to me, only the other day, that, if it were not for your sister, you would be the belle of the neighbourhood."

"But as I have a sister, I am nobody," replied Margaret; whilst the expression of her countenance changed from sarcasm to amusement. "Dear mamma, I have not the slightest wish for Mrs. St. Aubyn's praise."

"You need not despise it," said Mrs. Percival; if Mrs. St. Aubyn does not talk Latin and Greek, she belongs to a very good family, and she dresses beautifully, and has a handsome establishment; and these are points, Margaret, not to be thought lightly of: they go a great way in the opinion of the world."

"A great way, indeed," said Margaret, thoughtfully; and, turning to Harriet, she put a stop to the conversation, by appearing to give her whole attention to the history.

Mrs. Percival went away, after delivering one more injunction, that Margaret should, on no account, keep the carriage waiting. There is good arising out of every evil,—even out of a dull dinner party. Margaret's chief satisfaction from an invitation was found in the knowledge that it would ensure her a quiet afternoon; for a part, and a most irksome part, of her daily duties was to take the children for a walk; but when there was any engagement for the evening, Mrs. Per-

cival preferred having the charge of them herself, or even sending them out with a servant, or allowing them to play in the garden. She did not like Margaret to be fatigued, lest it might destroy her vivacity; and besides, if the walk were a long one, the toilette would certainly be hurried over, and Margaret would be dressed without those marks of elegance and finish which were absolutely essential, if she wished to appear to any advantage in Agatha's company.

The bell rang as usual for the early dinner: Mrs. Percival proceeded to superintend it, for she would allow no one to interfere with an affair which she believed to be important to her children's health; and Margaret's luncheon being soon finished, she retired, and, shutting herself up in her room, occupied herself with a book, until the pattering of feet on the stairs, the inquiries for gloves and bonnets, and, finally, the loud closing of the house door, proved that the way of escape was open. If she had met her mother she might probably have been told not to go beyond the garden; and that which Margaret above all things required was change of scene — something which should be free from the associations of books and slates. Mrs. Percival did not forbid a solitary walk, but she would not do any thing to further it; and Margaret's afternoons had often been spoilt by having a companion forced upon her against her will. Either an acquaintance, or her sister, or perhaps even one of the children, — an order being given at the same time that she was on no account to go farther than a mile from home. Happily for Margaret, her wishes seldom went beyond. There was only one direction which she ever felt much inclination to take, and this was towards the park and grounds of the family residence of the Viscount de Lisle. Henningsley was a square

baronial-looking mansion, with curious castellated walls, and corner turrets, standing on a projecting elevation in the centre of a large and undulating park. On one side the immense mound bore every appearance of being artificial, from its remarkable precipitousness; but the road which led to the front of the house, winding upward by degrees, reached at length a broad space, overlooked by still higher ground, and forming the lower part of a range of hills which extended about a mile beyond the outskirts of the domain. There was beauty in the park, and its noble trees, and quiet glades and copses; and there was antiquity and something of deserted grandeur in the massive irregular style of the edifice, forming a whole which few persons would have undertaken to alter with any view to improvement. But in detail, the building was devoid of all architectural merit. Sash windows and a Grecian portico exhibited themselves as if in disdain of a Gothic archway and an ornamental niche: windows in the drawing-room opened nearly to the ground, and windows in the dining-room were deeply set and mullioned. There was a handsome modern conservatory falling to decay, and before it a strip of garden bordered by a low yew edge, and trees cut into uncouth figures of lions and peacocks. There was a pleasure ground also, the turf of which had once been daily trimmed, and the shrubs carefully nurtured. Now, weeds grew around the sturdy roots of the old laurels; and arbutus and ilex, holly and acacia, mingled their thin spreading branches, shadowing the dank grass, and threatening in time to overrun and destroy the few remaining patches of the open lawn. The place was desolate and wretched: many said so at least. Margaret owned that it was the former, but she would never allow it to be the latter. To her it was full of romance.

She could walk without weariness hour after hour upon the broad stone pavement which ran along the length of the building, and was bordered by a heavy ballustrade built upon the edge of the steep hill; sometimes allowing her eye to wander vaguely over the cheerful wooded landscape which for many miles lay before her; and sometimes turning her thoughts to the dim ghost-like rooms, as they were seen through the dusky windows, and pondering upon the lives and the fortunes of those who, not many years before, had spent within those walls an existence active and hopeful, it might be far happier than her own. The house was kept by a sour-visaged woman, who was its sole occupant; but the general answer to any request for admittance was a sullen shake of the head, and an admonition, that "young folks shouldn't want old folks to do what they was ordered not." Margaret, however, knew that she had nothing to regret. The interior was rambling, dark, and inconvenient; suites of rooms opening one into the other, and piled with unwieldy, tapestried chairs, and cumbrous cabinets, and pictures turned to the walls, and empty frames from which some costly works of art had been from time to time removed. The furniture of the house was an heir-loom, and could not be sold; but it was disposed in as unsightly a manner as could well have been devised, and Margaret had found but little satisfaction in groping about amongst the masses of lumber which prevented her from entertaining any idea except that of the danger of falling.

One thing, however, the house contained, which was a constant source of interest. It was a picture which could be seen, as she looked through the dining-room window, hanging over the carved

stone mantel-piece, in a richly wrought antique frame: the whole-length figure of a young girl apparently not more than fourteen years of age. The hair turned over the forehead, and the dress of white satin with the stiff bodice, short sleeves, and deep ruffles of some centuries back, might have naturally given an air of formality even to so early a period of life; but the skill of the painter had succeeded, not only in sketching each fold of the rich dress, each line of the transparent lace, but likewise in retaining the clear dazzling complexion and elastic elegance of figure with which the idea of youth and enjoyment are so intimately connected. She was represented standing in a garden with a basket upon her arm, over the edge of which a few of the flowers with which it was filled were carelessly drooping. Lightheartedness and hope, and the fulness of delight of a spirit untaught by care, were delineated even in the graceful ease of the figure, which seemed as if about to spring forward in ecstasy; but the expressive features of the face portrayed all that words could have described. The stamp of nobility was traced upon the fair young brow; and intellect, and purity, and refinement were written in the large full hazel eyes and the delicate outline of the nose and mouth. It was a countenance which at one glance must have inspired emotions of affection and admiration; but there was something deeper within. Was it scorn which caused the slight, almost imperceptible, curl of the lip? and the lofty upraising of the head, and the turn of the long neck, could they be indications of pride? Probably few but Margaret would have suggested it, for few besides herself had gazed and dwelt upon the features till they had become engraven upon her heart, even as the features of a

living being with whom she had lived, and walked, and held daily converse. The picture was without a name, without a history, at least to her knowledge; but she had formed her own story of early happiness, and a luxurious home, and difficulty and sorrow, and the struggles of a noble but a haughty mind in after years; and now it stood before her, as truly the prophecy of events which had occurred within her own knowledge, as if she had been assured that the facts she imagined were realities. But there was no need to turn to the distant past for associations which should render Henningsley a place of interest. It had been left by its owner, not indeed from any circumstance of crime, or of sudden misfortune, nor from any secret cause which might give rise to curious speculation; but those who remembered the days when the Viscount de Lisle, (the representative of one of those ancient aristocratic families which in England have always adhered to the faith of the Romish church,) had, with his beautiful and gentle wife, kept up a splendid establishment, and offered their hospitality and their benevolence to all, of every degree, within the range of their acquaintance or their knowledge, could not but breathe a sigh of regret, as they thought of the change which lingering disease had made in that once happy household; of the years of exile in a foreign land, visited at first in search of health, and then adopted as a home because the climate of England was ill-suited to the Viscountess's delicacy of constitution; and of the deathbed of both, unsoothed by the sympathies of their friends, though hallowed by the tenderness and devotedness of their child. Both the Viscountess de Lisle and her husband had died in Italy within a few months of each other; but for

many years before Henningsley had been untenanted. The Viscount had always entertained the idea of returning to his native country, and would never consent that the family place should be occupied by strangers, and his last words to his daughter had been an injunction that she should on no account forget the claims of her English property, and the ties which bound her to the land of her fathers. But the words fell upon an unheeding ear. The young Countess Novera, the wife of an Italian nobleman, educated in the communion of the Roman Catholic church, and nurtured in the sunny regions of the south, felt little inclination to view, what she was accustomed to call, the bleak, dark country of heretics, from which her rank and wealth had been derived. Once, indeed, upon the call of positive legal necessity, she was induced, with her husband, to visit England for a few weeks; but neither the attractions of society, nor the kindness of her English relations, could prevail on her to extend her stay beyond the time which was absolutely required. Before her return to Italy, an order was given that Henningsley should, if possible, be let, but there was no one willing to inhabit it. In its desolate, and partly decayed state, it required a larger outlay of money to fit it for a residence than the Countess's agents thought it advisable to expend; and year after year it remained in the same, or rather in a worse condition than before, waiting for some fortunate chance, which might bring forward a tenant willing to make a present sacrifice for the sake of enjoying the place on very moderate terms when it should be restored and repaired.

Margaret had heard, as had every one else in the neighbourhood, of the first visit of the countess to England; but she was then a mere child, and the

circumstance excited no particular attention. The lovely portrait in the dining-room had for her even then a much more real existence than the wife of a foreign nobleman, of whose character she knew nothing, and whom she could never expect to meet: and when, as she grew older, tidings reached England that the Countess Novera was a widow at six-and-twenty, and speculations were afloat as to whether this event would be the means of bringing her to her native country, Margaret was no further affected by the observation than as it involved the probability of Henningsley being shut out from her solitary rambles. Two years had now elapsed since the death of the Count, and the existence of his young widow was almost forgotten, except by those whom business brought in contact with her name. Margaret roamed through the woods, and paced the terrace at Henningsley with a feeling of proprietorship. She never retained the idea that any thing could occur to disturb her enjoyment of the place, and even the cross housekeeper owned at last that Miss Margaret Percival seemed quite to belong to it. It was not without surprise, therefore, and something like indignation, that on the day when she was left, for the first time during a whole week, to follow her own pleasure, and directed her steps as usual to her favourite terrace, she perceived that two strangers had taken possession before her, and were walking up and down with a steady, business-like air, pointing to the windows, measuring lines, tapping the walls with their sticks, and then noting down observations in their memorandum books, with all the freedom of well-established right. Margaret's lady-like feelings instantly suggested the fear of intrusion, and, hastening away, she proceeded to the kitchen to make some inquiries of the housekeeper.

The woman, however, was either ignorant or sulky: she would give no information.

"Miss Margaret knew," she said, "that people were down every week to look at the house; and how should she tell any thing about them? They must be sent by the agent, Mr. Prior, and if Miss Margaret wanted to know about them, she had better call and ask."

Margaret professed herself not at all curious; she only desired to learn whether there was any reason why she should not walk on the terrace as usual.

"None at all," that Mrs. Collins knew; "but she wouldn't take upon herself to say. Miss Margaret might go and try."

Margaret, however, was not inclined to "go and try;" above all things, she disliked placing herself in a situation where her right might be called in question, and considerably disappointed, she walked away. Mrs. Collins' observation was tolerably true. Persons were at Henningsley, not exactly every week, yet certainly very frequently; but they were generally visitors for amusement, and she had not been incommoded by them. The two strangers were clearly men of business, and Margaret was afraid lest an old threat should at length be about to be carried into execution, and Henningsley be doomed to be pulled down. The thought made her very melancholy, for she began to be aware how great a portion of her daily pleasure had been derived from it. But so it was in every case; hope as she might, it was useless to shut her eyes to the conviction that change was written upon all things here below. Even at eighteen, the world was not bright as it had been in childhood; and what would it be at eighty? And Margaret's mind passed with a sensation of repugnance over the long years that

must intervene, whilst the question, what would have happened before that time should arrive? pressed upon her more and more. She would then have willingly seized upon the fatal gift which only the young can ever venture to desire,—the knowledge of the future that lay before her.

CHAPTER III.

The park-gate closed behind Margaret with a cheerless sound, and caring little for any walk now that the one which she preferred was stopped, she mechanically turned along the high-road towards Deering. The church was her parish church; and Sunday after Sunday Dr. Percival's family filled the square pew which was attached to the Grove. No one was ever absent except from absolute necessity, and Dr. Percival prided himself upon his regularity in attending the service at least once in the day. Margaret believed it to be her duty to go to church, and there was a certain satisfaction, therefore, arising from its performance: but she felt little pleasure in it. Her thoughts wandered during the prayers, and the sermon was long and uninteresting. It was impossible, she said to herself, to keep her attention fixed, and there was nothing external to assist her. The building was hideous. On the outside a glaring brick excrescence, with circular windows, joined to an old grey tower, partly overgrown with ivy; and in the inside, an awkward ill-arranged conventicle, dirty and neglected, crowded with pews, and dark with galleries. The altar, hidden by three unsightly pulpits, one for the preacher, another for the reader, and a third for the parish clerk; and the font (a carved wooden stand containing a china bason), set aside in a corner of the north aisle, as if neither deserving nor requiring notice. Margaret had never travelled: she had seldom been away from home for

more than a day in the immediate vicinity of Staunton; she could make no comparisons therefore, but natural taste suggested that something more was required for a place dedicated to the worship of God; that in an age when men build "ceiled houses" for themselves, the temple of the Most High should not be allowed to lie waste. She sometimes thought that the chapel of the Plymouth brethren at the entrance of the village was a more decorous house of prayer than the church. It was at least clean; there were no rank weeds growing around it, as the nettles overspread the churchyard; and it was light and airy; the persons who went there could both see and hear, and the singing, when they passed on a Sunday, was full and effective. In the church more than a third of the congregation were buried beneath the oppressive galleries; where the voice of the preacher, even if it had been the voice of the most exciting eloquence, could scarcely have reached them; and where the only effect of Mr. Stanley's sermons was to lull them into repose; whilst the singing, discordant and harsh, a perpetual contest between the barrel-organ and the untaught school-children, was, even to unpractised ears, a trial of patience much more than an incitement to devotion. The service of the church, in Margaret's opinion, was a burden upon, rather than an assistance to, the spirit of piety; and as she threw the odium of the children's defective education upon her mother's mismanagement, so she too often cast the blame of her own lukewarmness upon the clergyman of her parish. But on this day, as she stood by the churchyard gate, gazing upon the worn tombstones, many of which were nearly buried beneath tall grass and weeds, her meditations were less upon the faults of others, than upon her own. Margaret did some-

times enter upon the task of self-examination, she did occasionally enquire to what purpose she was living; and the enquiry, though never satisfactorily answered, and seldom followed up by resolutions of amendment, yet served to keep in her mind the remembrance that an object there ought to be — that there were persons in the world whose conduct was regulated according to some grand aim, which was constantly kept before them; and that whilst she allowed herself to be swayed by every passing impulse, to live without an end in view, her mind must be unstable, and her existence profitless. But this end, what was it to be? what had it been for the hundreds whose names met her eye as it wandered over the tombstones before her? They had passed into the unseen world; their earthly hopes, and joys, and sorrows, had ceased: one thing alone had they carried with them, — the memory of the governing principle of their lives. Margaret's thoughts, sobered by a momentary disappointment and a short reflection, carried her forward to the day when the account of that principle should be demanded from all. With some it might have been the desire of fame; with others, of money; with others, the impulse of a petty vanity; with many, very many, the mere wish of satisfying their daily needs; and with a few — was it not so with herself? — the gratification of a dreamy, self-indulgent spirit, wrapt in its own fancy, and heeding neither the pleasures nor the pains of the beings amongst whom it dwelt. Margaret felt that her life was not innocent, and she sighed; and the sigh was echoed as if in amusement by some one near her. She turned quickly. A very gentlemanly person, seemingly about eight-and-thirty, stood at a few paces distant, leaning against the wall, and watching her with interest. He was of the middle height; but

a slight figure gave him the appearance of being much taller. His countenance, though not unmarked by care, was peculiarly attractive; less, however, from the regularity of the features than from the sweetness of expression which pervaded them, and which softened the effect of the indications of a powerful intellectual mind, given by a high projecting forehead, and a searching deep blue eye. Margaret's face brightened with no ordinary pleasure as she perceived him.

"My dear uncle! how very delightful! When did you come?"

"My dear Margaret! how very delightful, too! I arrived about a quarter of an hour ago:" and then, looking laughingly around to see that no one was near, Mr. Sutherland said, as he kissed her affectionately, "I found the Grove deserted, but I shall not quarrel with a cold reception if I have a walk with you to make up for it."

"We did not mean it," said Margaret, eagerly; "we did not hear any thing of your coming."

"No, because I had no time to give you notice; I am here on speculation. A friend in the neighbourhood offered to take my Sunday's duty, and I resolved to give myself a holiday: but you must tell me, are you engaged? is the house empty?"

"Yes, quite; and we have no engagements whatever, except—that is, I forgot—a dull dinner party at the parsonage this evening."

"Which will not be in my way, more than by taking you from me, if I may have a mutton chop, and some tea with the children, instead of a state dinner by myself."

"So like you," exclaimed Margaret, "always thinking how you can avoid giving trouble; but mamma won't hear of that."

"Yes, she will, when I have talked to her a little.

Besides, it will give me an opportunity of noting progress. We will have an examination of the young ideas. What do you say, Margaret? are they advancing?"

Margaret shook her head, and could not smile. Mr. Sutherland noticed the expression.

"It is a troublesome task," he said; "but you will manage it by and by. And Agatha—how is she? as gay as ever?"

"Gayer," replied Margaret; "she is become an intimate friend of Mrs. St. Aubyn."

"What! Mrs. St. Aubyn, the widow of Lord Delamere's nephew? How long has that been?"

"About six weeks, or so; but I thought I told you of it when I wrote."

"You mentioned something; but I fancied it was only one of Agatha's numerous conquests. I did not know it had reached to a friendship."

"A friendship, according to Agatha's notions, not mine," said Margaret.

"Well! but at any rate, name it friendship, or what you will, I suppose it is an intimacy."

"Yes, indeed it is. Mrs. St. Aubyn calls every other day; and Agatha is driving about with her and Colonel Clive constantly."

"And who is Colonel Clive?"

"An old, tiresome bachelor-brother just come into possession of the Ashington property. You need not smile, uncle Henry; he is really an old bachelor—horridly ugly, and very ill-tempered: so Agatha is quite safe."

"We will hope so; and Mrs. St. Aubyn, is she very charming?"

"Very elegant, and fashionable, and good natured. She really does like Agatha, I believe, for it can be no object to her to take her about as she does."

"Elegant, and fashionable, and good natured—" began Mr. Sutherland.

"And brainless," added Margaret; "she has not an idea in her head."

"And so you are all very fond of her," continued Mr. Sutherland.

"Oh, no! not I, nor mamma, nor any one but Agatha: and you know what her fondness means."

Mr. Sutherland walked on a few paces in silence. "And Grace is still very troublesome?" he said, at length.

"Worse every day," replied Margaret. "I wish, yes, I wish from the bottom of my heart, that I could give up the whole thing."

"You would not be happier," said Mr. Sutherland, mildly.

"But you cannot judge. Each person must know best what is likely to conduce to his own individual happiness."

"Nay, Margaret; look around, and see if each person does know best. The whole world is rushing after happiness, and yet, what mistakes are every day made in endeavouring to find it!"

"Happiness is intended to be the object of our lives, though," said Margaret.

"No; there I must differ from you. It is an old argument of ours: happiness is not to be our object; and if we make it such, we shall never obtain it. And when I said just now that you would not be happier in giving up teaching the children, I was merely putting forward a motive for contentment which might suit you, not one which I should consider satisfactory myself."

"You would require duty, I know," said Margaret; "but we are so different. You are a clergyman, and a good deal older; and you don't care for things in the same way that I do. You don't mind

plodding on from day to day at Alton by yourself; but really, I don't think you can understand any thing about me."

"Let me try," said Mr. Sutherland, as he turned into a shady lane, which led away from the high road; "or are you tired? Perhaps as you are to dine out this evening, we had better walk back."

"No, no," exclaimed Margaret; "you don't know half the pleasure it is to have you all to myself: and if I am tired, I shall only be like every one else."

"Well, then, we will go on; and now, tell me, what would you do if the children were taken away from you to-morrow?"

"Sit by myself in my own room all day to indulge in the luxury of quietness."

Mr. Sutherland smiled. "I grant you that would be perfect enjoyment for the time being; but the next day, what would you do?"

"I don't know exactly: you take me by surprise; but I should have more than enough to occupy me?"

"An *embarras de richesses*, in fact," continued her uncle. "German, I suppose, as a study in the morning."

"Yes, certainly; and I should have time for reading then, I should begin with a regular course of it: and I want to understand something of natural history; I rather think I should take up botany, because it would give me an interest in my walks; and besides, I should be able to go on with my drawing; I should sketch a good deal, and practise. Agatha is always complaining that I never play or sing with her. Now, is there any harm in all this?" And Margaret looked up in her uncle's face with a sweet earnest smile of enquiry, which even to an indifferent person must have been very winning.

"My dear child," he said, as he placed his hand fondly upon hers, "I cannot bear to damp all this longing for improvement. These things are very good, very pure; no one can find fault with them."

"And they would make me happy," said Margaret.

"No, Margaret, there is the mistake; they would not make you happy. Taken up as you would take them up, constituted from inclination only the business and object of life, they would but render you miserable."

"But why?"

"For the very reason that they are so pure and good in themselves. When you once grew weary of them you would have nothing to fall back upon."

"But that is assuming a case," said Margaret.

"It is only assuming what must happen, sooner or later, with every object in life, except one."

"I need not trouble myself till the time arrives, though," said Margaret. A sigh from her uncle, as she spoke the words, recalled her to other thoughts. "I am vexing you," she said; "I always do when I talk to you."

"No; I was wrong to sigh. I feel, I know, that you will think differently by and by."

Mr. Sutherland stopped, and walking aside to a gate which opened into some meadows, stood apparently intent upon the view which was to be seen from it. Margaret followed him, and resting her hand upon his shoulder, said, in a low voice:

"I do think differently, sometimes."

Mr. Sutherland turned towards her and smiled. But she could not know the thoughts which were passing in his mind. She could not then have understood them; for the hope which is felt by those who have given up their hearts unreservedly to

their Maker, when the first awakening of a holier spirit is perceived in the friends whom they have loved and sorrowed over, can only be comprehended by minds which have learnt to read truly the lesson of this mortal life, and can realize, though but in a faint degree, the immeasurable destinies that are dependent on it. Mr. Sutherland loved his niece more dearly than any other earthly being. He was a man whom the world envied; unmarried, popular in society, respected, and even admired. His income indeed was very small, but his parish was not large, and he had no claims upon him beyond; and for all these reasons he was frequently instanced as an example of comparatively perfect human prosperity. That he had no wife was, of course, his own choice; and people had really learnt to believe at length, that he never intended to have one, and was quite contented without. And Mr. Sutherland was contented. He was thankful that he had been strengthened to submit without repining to the decree, which had consigned to an early grave one whom he had hoped might have been the solace of his life; and now, after the lapse of twelve years, when he could trace the current of events, and see how they had all contributed to good, he could acknowledge that such a dispensation was best for his own character; that it had enabled him to devote himself more fully to his duties, and to live without that absorbing interest in things belonging to this world, which from his natural disposition might otherwise have proved a snare to him. But the world could not know the struggle which preceded the peace that Mr. Sutherland now enjoyed; and Margaret, who was just beginning to prize his affection, and to consider it as something peculiarly her own, from hearing it constantly asserted that she was his favourite, little imagined that it had

grown up by slight degrees; because, in the depth of his affliction, when he shrank from exposing his feelings to common observation, her quickness, and simplicity, and childish love, had served to divert his thoughts, or to cover the agony of a secret grief. Mr. Sutherland cherished Margaret as a child, more perhaps for the sake of another than for her own; but even an absence of several years did not diminish his affectionate recollection of her; and when, a short time previous to their present meeting, he returned to the neighbourhood to take possession of a living, and renewed his intercourse with his sister's family, his early predilection strengthened into a fondness, which had in it something of a father's proud delight, and of a brother's warm unreserved intimacy. Margaret was now almost a woman, and her uncle was still in feeling a young man. They were more on a par, more like a sister and an elder brother, at every meeting; and the charm of Margaret's character was daily increasing. Mr. Sutherland saw her faults; he knew her to be irritable, self-willed, and visionary; and he heard his sister's complaints of her neglect, and love of seclusion, and want of interest in common affairs; but he saw that these defects belonged to a noble mind. Margaret was not only winning in manner, and more than pleasing from the varying expression and striking intelligence of her countenance, but she was also generous and candid, and humble in her opinion of herself; pure and simple in her tastes, and possessing a delicacy of feeling which he had never seen equalled. She could appreciate goodness, though she did not follow it; and her enthusiasm in favour of all that was noble and beautiful in history or fiction required but one principle to elevate it into a devotion to true greatness.

That principle Mr. Sutherland gently but unceasingly strove to infuse; yet less by talking of religion directly than indirectly. His wish was rather to convince Margaret of the unsatisfactory nature of her present life than to bring before her, when her mind was not prepared for it, the prospect of a better; and often when his own heart was filled with thoughts of piety and gratitude, he would listen to and sympathise with her complaints of the insipidity of life, and scarcely do more than insinuate that the defect lay in herself, and not in the arrangements of Providence. Margaret's taste, though fastidious to a fault, was never offended by any thing her uncle said. At times, when the conversation had given a higher tone to her mind, she would bear from him remarks, and even reproofs, which would have chilled and repelled her, if they had been spoken without caution by any other person. Her reserve was never intruded upon, and she was not distressed by descriptions of personal feelings which she could not comprehend. Mr. Sutherland's voice was the more calm, his words were the more guarded, as his interest became excited; and it was only by a deepening tone, or a reverent earnestness of manner, that Margaret could see how fervent was the zeal, how unwearied and devoted the affection, which had been awakened in her behalf. So it was in the present case. Mr. Sutherland's reply to his niece's confession was simple, almost unconcerned. "You will soon think differently always," he said, as he turned homewards. "I have prophesied it, have I not, often? and I think the time is coming."

"Do you?" said Margaret, gravely. "I believe I should be happier if it were."

"I do not only believe it, but I know it. The

human mind, Margaret, was not formed for earth, and earth cannot satisfy it."

"But," replied Margaret, "that is my difficulty. There are some persons whom I can see to have important duties; I can imagine their having exalted ideas, and living, as I sometimes hear you say, above the world. It is a pleasure to fancy myself like them; but daily life, eating and drinking, and teaching the children—what greatness is there in such things?"

"And what greatness is there in studying Schiller and Dante, and practising music and drawing?" inquired Mr. Sutherland.

"No greatness," said Margaret, sighing, "only amusement, and that they lead to great thoughts, that they give one a feeling of inspiration."

"And when the feeling is passed, what then?"

"Yes, I know; I allow that it is all momentary; but at the time it is superior."

"No, Margaret, not so,—at least according to my ideas. All things are, in themselves, petty alike."

Margaret looked up in surprise. "But that is very unlike your usual way of talking. What do you mean?"

"Let us carry on our thoughts a few years," replied Mr. Sutherland. "You will not be angry, Margaret, I know, to be told that you cannot be young for ever. Suppose yourself grown old,—a wrinkled woman of eighty,—with white hair, hobbling about on crutches."

"Or leaning on a gold-headed cane," said Margaret: crutches are so plebeian."

"Well, a gold-headed cane if you will. Now you are to look back upon the eighty years; and you shall have been, if you like, a very wise woman, or say, perhaps, more truly, a learned one: a lin-

guist, and a metaphysician, and a beautiful artist, and a splendid musician, — any thing and every thing, in fact a female admirable Crichton. Now, at eighty years old, what will remain of all this knowledge?"

"Good to others, perhaps," said Margaret.

"But good of what nature? When these others have reached the same age, what will they themselves be the better? or — for it is the question which we must come to at last — what portion of it will they carry with them into another state of existence?"

Margaret was silent.

"We were reading together a most striking part of the book of Ecclesiasticus when I was here last," said Mr. Sutherland; "do you remember it? There was one verse which spoke of a hope or an object in life, which is 'like dust that is blown away with the wind; like a thin froth that is driven away with the storm; like as the smoke which is dispersed here and there with a tempest, and passeth away as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day.'"

"The hope of the ungodly," said Margaret, thoughtfully: "yes, I remember the passage very well."

"Ungodly means not grossly wicked, but simply not godly," said Mr. Sutherland.

And there was a long pause.

"I cannot feel it," exclaimed Margaret at length. "I know all you would say; but it does not come home to me; and there seems a fallacy at the bottom of it. The very instincts of our nature teach us to find pleasure in knowledge and art, and cultivation of the mind."

"There is pleasure, pure and lasting pleasure,

to be found in all; but not in the way in which you would seek it."

"I know no way of finding it but one," said Margaret,—"studying, because I like it."

"Then you delight in inanimate beauty, a body without a soul. All that is admirable in reality or imagination can be but like the statue of Prometheus, until we have caught the fire from heaven which is to gift it with life."

"If studying satisfies me," said Margaret, "what can I want more?"

"But, Margaret, you mistake your own feelings. The insipidity you complain of, the weariness at your daily occupations, prove that you are not satisfied."

"Not with my daily occupations, certainly, but I have a world of my own which no one can enter."

"A world of phantoms, — and your spirit is immortal, and the craving for truth is rooted in the very depths of your being."

Margaret quickened her steps. It was the sign of the disturbance of her mind. Mr. Sutherland feared he had pressed the subject too far.

"Perhaps, I teaze you," he said: "our conversation always seems to turn upon this one subject."

"It is impossible to be otherwise," replied Margaret, "for I believe it is uppermost in both our thoughts."

"In mine, I own; but I can scarcely think that it is in yours."

"Yes, when I am with you; when you are absent I can forget, and go on in my own way; but the very sight of you brings a sense of doubt. My life is a dream then, because I know that you think it so.

"How can I help it?" I see you resting upon

shadows. You are imagining happiness, when you might be enjoying it."

"Are you happy?" said Margaret, turning quickly round.

Mr. Sutherland waited before replying, and a slight flush passed over his face. "Yes, Margaret," he said, at length, in a deep, subdued tone, "I am happy. So far as I have learnt to dwell in the world which is invisible, I am quite happy; but the lesson is yet miserably imperfect, and while it is, there must still be trial."

Margaret's heart smote her, She had forcibly intruded herself into the sanctuary of those feelings which were reserved only for the eye of God; and the lowliness of her uncle's words was painful to her. She could not yet appreciate humility.

"I know I do not understand you," she said, as they came in view of the Grove, and she saw that the conversation must soon be terminated. "Your notions are as unreal to me as my world of fancy appears to you."

"My meaning will soon be told," he said, "if you will bear to hear it. I would say that the higher qualities of our being, the admiration of the beautiful and noble, the craving for affection, the desire of immortal fame, and all that raises our thoughts above the needs of our animal life, are so many remnants of that perfect nature which was given to us at our creation, and degraded, not utterly lost, at the fall. That these instincts must be either satisfied or crushed ; and that God, when he deigned to work out the restoration of mankind, provided for their full gratification."

Margaret's attention was excited, and as her uncle stopped before the entrance gate, she gently drew him on.

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"There is no hurry," she observed; "we will turn again."

Mr. Sutherland readily assented to the proposal.

"I need not say to you, Margaret," he continued, "how strong these principles are, nor how great is the pleasure of indulging them: upon that point, at least, we are agreed."

"And upon many others, I trust," said Margaret, affectionately.

"Yes, upon many; but there is one on which we are essentially at variance. You say that you find your happiness in the imaginative exercise of these feelings, that you form your own world, and people it with your own characters, and that you enact in it scenes which interest you. I say, that where the foundation is unreal, the pleasure must be unenduring."

"I will grant that," said Margaret, in a thoughtful tone.

"But there is a world," pursued her uncle, "it is in part invisible like yours, and it is peopled with beings, some perfected by trial, others struggling to become so; and in this world scenes are enacted upon which depend the destinies, not of years, but of eternity. If we would seek for persons to admire, Margaret, where shall we find them but amongst those who have lived on earth the lives of saints? And if we wish for an object to set before us, where can we find a greater than that of training ourselves and others for heaven? And for love — it is the strongest instinct of our nature — there is One now looking upon us, who gave up heaven for our sake."

Mr. Sutherland spoke rapidly, and then stopped himself, as if fearful of being carried away by his own earnestness.

"That world is for the good," said Margaret; "it is beyond me."

"Yet you have been admitted into it: its claims are upon you, and you cannot escape from them."

"Yes, of course, I know," and Margaret blushed slightly; "but this is so vague. We are all Christians certainly, and I am sure we ought to be a great deal better than we are; I mean to try some day. But the ideas which you put forward are, as I said before, beyond me: still I can entirely agree with you, that it is necessary to do one's duty and go to church; and I really believe, though perhaps you will scarcely give me credit for such a principle, that nothing but a wish to do what is right would induce me to go on teaching the children."

"I do give you credit for it, sincerely: my only wish is to make it a pleasure as well as a duty; to save you from the perpetual struggle between imagination and reality."

"Ah! if you could — but two things so opposed!"

"We argue in a circle," said Mr. Sutherland; "but you shall do me one favour, Margaret. You shall take St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, and exercise your imagination by fancying that you are reading it for the first time. You have an Italian Bible, I know; read it in Italian, or German, or any thing which will give the words the force of novelty. Do not stop at the chapters, but go on to the end; and then ask yourself, honestly, what its purport is. And I would say," he added gently, but very impressively, "that if you will, before you begin, pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, there will be no further need of my words to convince you, that truth contains more to satisfy us than fiction. You will pray, dear Margaret, won't

you ?" he repeated again, as they once more stood at the Grove gate : "it would make me so happy to be certain that you would."

Margaret's eyes glistened. "You need not fear," she said : and, withdrawing her arm quickly, she entered the house.

CHAPTER IV.

The dinner parties at Deering parsonage were, as they had been described, most commonly dull in mental, and inferior in physical qualifications. Mr. Stanley was a good-natured, liberal man, having a great dread of innovation, and no very elevated idea of the duties of his profession. He distributed blankets and coals at Christmas, and gave the school children a feast on the lawn at Midsummer. When he was sent for he attended to his poor parishioners, and when he was invited he never failed to visit his rich ones. Some persons criticised, and observed that the latter was a more favourite duty than the former; but, be this as it may, Mr. Stanley was properly alive to the reciprocal duties of hospitality. Regularly as the year passed, the circle of his acquaintance were in turn invited to dinner, and having provided plentifully for their bodily needs, Mr. Stanley felt himself under no other obligation for their amusement. His wife occupied herself with the business of arrangements, the smallness of her rooms, and the awkwardness of her servants; and had but a divided attention to bestow upon her guests. There was an effort about her, an air of indifference about him; and the homeliness which would have been unregarded when accompanied by a sincere welcome, was in consequence exaggerated and ridiculed.

Margaret endured, but impatiently, the weariness of the long dinner, and the lingering trial

of the talking evening, looking over prints which she had seen twenty times before. She had no interest in any thing, and was only once aroused to attention by hearing a few words of conversation between Agatha and Mrs. St. Aubyn. Agatha's countenance was lighted up with pleasure, whilst Mrs. St. Aubyn said something about a flying visit, and an absence merely of a week: — *à propos* to what Margaret could not find out; but Colonel Clive was required to add his entreaties; and Agatha was looking at her mother, as if desirous even then of making a request, when the carriage was announced. Mrs. St. Aubyn's manner was very kind, and Margaret could not help acknowledging that, notwithstanding her insipidity, she was really pleasing from her good nature. The short drive home was a silent one. Margaret received no explanation to satisfy her curiosity, for Agatha was not in a communicative mood, and the conversation was left to Dr. and Mrs. Percival, Margaret being afraid of making remarks before her mother, lest it should bring upon her a lecture on the duties owing to society. Mr. Sutherland was waiting for them in the library. He would not allow that he had been lonely, for the children had stayed with him till nearly nine o'clock; and since then he had been reading: but he was pleased to see them return so soon, and expected a full description of their gaiety. Agatha gave it in rather exaggerated terms; even the mistakes of the new man-servant, and the blunders of the cook, were not forgotten; and Margaret grew uncomfortable. It did not suit Mr. Sutherland's look of thoughtful attention. His smile was sweet, it was never otherwise, but he was soon satisfied; and Margaret felt, as she had often done before, that the affairs of common life, even the routine of

a dinner party, assumed a different aspect when he was present.

"I have a secret for you, Margaret," said Agatha, as they stood together, lighting their candles, before separating for the night.

"For me? why? what?"

"Yes, for you; but you are not to hear now."

Margaret would not appear to care, though her sister evidently meant that she should. "If I am not to hear, there is no use in inquiring," she said; "so, good night."

"But you will like it, though I am not sure it will come to pass. You have talked of it very often; so we have both. If it does happen, you won't find fault with Mrs. St. Aubyn again."

"Agatha, how extremely childish! If Grace were to behave so, I should punish her."

Agatha looked pleased. She had a weak love of tormenting in trifles, particularly where Margaret was concerned; for it was the only way in which she could prove that she had any power over her. "Good night," she said, taking up her candle; "I must go and talk to mamma. You need not trouble yourself to think, — you will never guess."

Margaret might have made a hasty reply; but Mr. Sutherland appeared from the drawing-room, and the impulse was checked. She did not know why. It was not shame merely, for that might have kept her silent, but it could not have made her amiable; yet she did really feel forgiving towards Agatha, and their sisterly embrace was cordial. Agatha ran up stairs, and Margaret lingered by the hall table. "Are you tired, my dear child?" said her uncle, as he marked the change of her countenance from its usual bright expression.

"Dinner parties make one tired, — and thoughtful too," said Margaret.

"I think they often do; but I am not sure that that is an objection against them."

"Not only tired, but disgusted, discontented."

"The dinner parties! are you certain of that?"

"What am I now?" said Margaret, half smiling; "and what has made me so?"

"Ah! that is the question: what has made you so?"

"Dull realities," replied Margaret, archly; "Soup and mutton, tea, coffee, wine, and whist."

"Nay: they are satisfying realities; you can have no fault to find with them."

"Well, if you will, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, Colonel Clive, Sir James Dermot, &c. &c.; but I was afraid you would scold me for saying it."

"No, I never scold: it seldom does any good."

"Specially to me," observed Margaret: "the proud Percival spirit rebels against it."

"And you would not wish it to do otherwise. You are a little proud of your pride, Margaret."

Mr. Sutherland spoke lightly, but Margaret saw that there was a deeper meaning underneath. "I am never proud of it with you," she said.

"And some day you will not be with any one: you will have a new code of morals."

"But till that day comes,"— began Margaret.

"It must come soon, or it may come never. Margaret, love, this world was not meant for delay."

Margaret lighted her uncle's candle, and bent forward for his kiss. "Thank you, God bless you, my child," he said, and they separated.

"This world was not meant for delay." The words rang in Margaret's ear; they pained and oppressed her, and she turned from them; but they haunted her, — spoken in the serious tone, and accompanied by the look of affection, deeper than

could be told, which so frequently impressed Mr. Sutherland's casual remarks upon her mind. Margaret was in truth, as she had said, disgusted and discontented; but her thoughts were directed into a new channel. The dinner party was, in a manner, forgotten. She was not inclined to criticise it; for it was only when incited by the wish to produce a laugh that she was ever really satirical. Her mind was too candid to be severe, and when aware, as in solitude she constantly was, of at least some of her own imperfections, she had no will to dwell upon the frailties of others. With a sensation of greater mental than physical fatigue she seated herself at her dressing-table, and gave way to a train of wandering reflections which gradually settled into deep self-reproach. Could Mr. Sutherland be right? was it true that her code of morals, her principle of action, was a false one? It was an hour when, if ever, conscience must assert its supremacy. Silence and repose were around her, there was no distraction, either from business or pleasure, — no glitter of vanity, no beauty, even of the external world, to call her attention aside. The question would be answered. And for the moment it was answered, by the memory of childish offences, and the sins of advancing years; passion and pride, irreverence and undutifulness, selfishness and frivolity, and the long list of ignorances and errors, which make the days of our youth a burden even to the most innocent; whilst still, amidst them all, came the same warning voice, but sterner and more urgent, — "This world was not meant for delay." An Italian Bible lay beside her. It was occasionally read, and Margaret could feel intense pleasure in some parts from their awful beauty and simplicity. Now it was taken up with a different view. She turned to the epistle of which her uncle had spoken: the study

of that, at least, she would not delay; and the resolution afforded her a transient satisfaction. But Mr. Sutherland had given her another injunction; he had spoken of prayer, and this also must be obeyed.

Margaret was in no presumptuous mood: how can we ever be when the phantoms of our buried faults are crowding around us? It was not the wilfulness of pride which made her shrink from the idea of prayer; but "God was in heaven, and she was upon earth;" and the duty which had so often before been performed without preparation seemed suddenly to require an earnestness of devotion which she felt herself wholly unable to give. The Bible was resumed, in the hope that after reading it her mind might be in a better tone; but she was not at ease, and it was closed again, and as she knelt to ask what she still hesitated to express in her own words, the prayer which from childhood she had heard as duly as the Advent season returns to bid the Christian world prepare for the coming of its Lord recurred to her recollection. Margaret had said it often before; it had been learnt as a lesson for the Sunday, and written in the blank page of her first Bible: but at that moment it seemed fraught with a deeper meaning. Humbly and sincerely, and with no hope of acceptance for her own sake, it was uttered as the language of the heart; and then Margaret rose, and once more opening the volume of inspiration commenced her appointed task.

The hour of midnight had gone by, and Margaret was not at rest: her weariness had passed away, and the whole energies of her mind were awakened. They were indeed wonderful words which lay before her, telling of that eternal counsel of the Most High, by which the children of His adoption, the redeemed and forgiven, are gathered together in one body

under Christ their Head, and made to be "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." They spoke of the "riches of a glorious inheritance," of "access by one Spirit unto the Father," and of the mighty change whereby they who had once been "strangers and foreigners" were made "fellow-citizens with the saints" and parts "of the household of God." Margaret read, as she had been advised, without pausing at separate chapters, without even endeavouring to master the difficulties which they contained. Much was incomprehensible to her, as it had always been; but the purport of the whole could not be doubted.

It was addressed to persons whose position was totally different from that which it could have been by nature. It gave them a motive for action, not from what they were expecting to obtain, but from what they had already received. It reminded them of the privileges and responsibilities of a high vocation, and after detailing, even to minuteness, the course of daily life which they were to pursue, it warned them that in that life, in the struggle against "bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking," and the temptations of a corrupt nature, they were contending not merely against the weaknesses and impulses of their own hearts, but "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." There was something strange to Margaret's own mind, in the new form which the well-known words had assumed; and as she pondered upon them, a glow of elevation and hope passed over her. There was, then, something to make life important; a rank to maintain, even that of the child of an Almighty Father; an object, even the defeating the temptations of that spirit of dark-

ness, who till then had been to her more a chimera of the imagination than a living being. The love which, through shame and agony, had removed the curse from a sinful world, and made her, at her baptism, a member of the Christian church, was to be the spring of her gratitude and her exertions; and the crown which awaited her in heaven, the hope that was to animate her ambition.

Were they new tidings? Was Margaret Percival, with her talents, and enthusiasm, and energy, uninstructed in the fundamental principles of religion? In a Christian country, admitted into the Catholic church, and taught to conform to its outward rules, this could not be. Margaret knew all that was required to be known and believed "for her soul's health;" and yet on that night, as she tasked all the powers of her intellect to realise the truths of which she had read, they came to her with the stunning overwhelming force of a fact, awful yet not to be doubted, which is heard for the first time.

Many must have felt the same. Many must have known the vivid clearness with which words, learnt from childhood, will sometimes flash upon the mind; bringing with them, in their hidden meaning, a light to shine upon the darkness of our ignorance. "The heaven which lies about us in our infancy" does indeed "fade into the light of common day" as we advance farther into life; but it exists, though unknown, save in a nominal belief, and when our eyes have been re-opened to behold it, there is nothing but our own wilful sin which can again hide it from our sight:—Magaret's feelings could not, however, be lasting. We may rejoice in newly acquired honours and privileges; but when they have long been ours, yet neglected, they can be viewed only with shame. The same

apostle who spoke of the mystery of God's will, and the "exceeding riches of His grace," spoke also of holiness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance,—the signs of that new nature which, "after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness."—Where were they?—Once more, Margaret's conscience answered sincerely, and tears of real repentance rose to her eyes. They were not the first which she had shed, for she had often thought of goodness, and longed to practise it; but they flowed from a deeper source—for it was the sense of her own ingratitude which touched her.

There was little, however, that was overpowering in this self-reproach. Margaret accused herself, and justly, of coldness; for it is not until we have been taught fully to appreciate our blessings, that we can really understand the extent of devotion which is due from us; and Margaret had no glaring sins to humble her, at first sight, to the very dust. She was young, and simple-minded; and ignorant of much of the world's evil. Yet when, at length, exhausted by mental and bodily fatigue, she prepared for her short night's rest, and confessed, in the accustomed words, that she had "erred and strayed from God's ways like a lost sheep;" the acknowledgment was made as it had never been before, and her hope of forgiveness rested not upon the trust which had so often deceived her, the resolution of future amendment, but upon the merits and intercession of the Saviour, in whose name her petitions were offered.

CHAPTER V.

MARGARET had advanced a step, a great step, in her knowledge of the truth. So she was conscious of having done, when she awoke the following morning, and faintly and gradually the recollections of the preceding night came to her mind. But if there had been only a passing excitement then, there was still less remaining now. The words which had so forcibly struck her, when read in the silence of midnight, lost much of their impressiveness when remembered in the light of day. Yet their meaning was the same—the fault lay in herself, and she felt it painfully.

Mr. Sutherland's mind had so far formed his niece's, as to teach her that feeling is to be stimulated by action; and when Margaret found herself cold and insensible, scarcely able to comprehend the force of expressions which, but a few hours before, had seemed to give a new impulse to her existence, there was no endeavour to arouse herself by any unnatural effort. Her prayers seemed miserably imperfect, but she tried to fix her attention, and her wandering thoughts were recalled as often as perceived. She opened her Bible, and whilst hurried from being late, read over a few verses, and forced herself to bring the import before her understanding, though they made but little impression upon her heart; and before descending to the breakfast table, she considered the circumstances which would, most probably, arise to try her temper, and asked that she might be able to subdue

herself. It was a beginning, and made in sincerity; and upon all such beginnings the blessing of God will assuredly rest.

Margaret was not the last of the party who appeared. Agatha's place was still vacant, and Margaret was glad, for it saved her from a possible reprimand. Mr. Sutherland had kept a vacant seat for her, and offered her the little attentions which bespeak affection much more than words. Perhaps he scarcely knew himself how clearly his partiality was shown, but it caused neither envy nor remark. Margaret received so little notice in general, in comparison with her sister, that no one thought of grudging her the love of an uncle. His kindness was felt now more than usual, for Margaret's heart was burdened. All things were in appearance the same; the room, the furniture, the party, the signs of opulence and comfort; and to the outward eye she was the same also, but there were thoughts within her mind upon which the whole current of her future life might depend.

It is strange, yes, almost surpassing belief, were it not for our daily experience, the contrast between the movements of the world within our own breasts, and that which lies open to our senses. We eat and drink, we meet and converse, we mingle in the pursuits and interchange the courtesies of life, and call ourselves friends and brothers; and on the neutral ground of earth's interests and of our common hopes of heaven, we may and ought to be such. But how few, how very few, are ever permitted to pass the barrier which separates the inward and the outward man,—to gaze upon that region where dwell side by side the secret motives of vanity, selfishness, and ambition, and the silent but unutterable yearnings of affection; the fervent aspirations of devotion, and the aching pangs of conscience;

that region where the true business of existence, the existence that shall never end, is transacted unceasingly, though perhaps unconsciously, by each for himself alone. There are moments, and they can never be forgotten, when, under the pressure of some overwhelming grief, or the influence of external circumstances, we are tempted to unbar the portals of our hearts, and betray the secrets of our "prison house." We speak of hopes that have long been dead, and joys passed away for ever; we mourn over the sins of our youth, and the oft-repeated offences of the present day; and strengthen ourselves against future temptations by resolutions to which another's heart is witness. And at times, we even dare to open the sanctuary of our renewed nature, and breathe into a human ear the faint sighings of that heavenly love which is the foretaste, as it will be the fulfilment and perfection, of our eternal happiness. They who have communed in such hours are friends indeed, — in the sight of God, as well as in the eye of man. But even with them, beyond the sympathy and the fulness of the love which Heaven has blessed, there are sadder secrets — many and untold; thoughts which the ear of affection would shrink from hearing, feelings which even in the anguish of repentance could scarcely be acknowledged, depths of the mystery of sin, unperceived even by ourselves, and fathomed only by that Almighty Being, who has pronounced that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

The world which we bear about with us must differ widely from the world in which we appear to dwell. It is in this contrast, this want of harmony between the visible and invisible, the seen and the felt, that lies the trial of our daily life; and often as we are tempted to judge hastily and unkindly,

to murmur at the moody look, or to reprove the sigh of discontent, it may perhaps check us to remember that when earth is bright to us, it may be dark within the hearts of those we love; and that the slight symptoms of annoyance which jar upon our sensibility, or ruffle our temper, may be but the signs of some inward struggle, with which, if we could behold it, we should but too painfully sympathise.

Margaret was grave when all around her were gay. She made some efforts to be otherwise, but they were awkward and unsuccessful; and her manner was noticed and commented on both by her father and mother. Mr. Sutherland remarked it also, but he said nothing. He did not even offer a glance of compassion; but he endeavoured to change the conversation; and, after a few hints from Mrs. Percival upon the disagreeableness of silence, the general attention was directed to Agatha.

"She is tired, poor child! I suppose," said Mrs. Percival; "she exerts herself so much when she is out; not that there is much occasion for exertion at the Rectory, every one is given up to dulness."

"There is no engagement for to-night, is there?" asked Mr. Sutherland.

"No, happily," exclaimed Dr. Percival, throwing himself back in his chair, and taking up a newspaper. "Half a cup more tea, if you please, Julia; and a little stronger."

"I don't see why any one should say happily," observed Mrs. Percival, who was always alive to the probability of Margaret's love of seclusion being strengthened. "If persons did not meet now and then, and try to make themselves agreeable,

what would become of them? what would there be worth living for?"

"A very good thing society is," began Mr. Sutherland; but, as his eye caught Margaret's, he smiled, and allowed the rest of his sentence to remain unfinished. He had no wish to bring forward the often disputed argument between her and her mother. Margaret ate her breakfast, and did not look up, but she tried to think of something to say.

"I don't trust you, Henry," remarked Mrs. Percival: "I believe, in your heart, you are quite as bad as Margaret. You bury yourself at Alton till you are not aware that you have a neighbour in existence."

"Nay, pardon me; if I were so very misanthropical, I should not be here. Seriously, I like society extremely; and here comes Agatha to join with me."

Agatha looked more full of thought than was her wont. She went up to her mother, and said something in a low voice. Mrs. Percival's reply, however, seemed to satisfy her; and with an air of triumph and importance she began her breakfast. Margaret's mind was too much occupied to notice this; she had forgotten the threatened secret, for Agatha was always fond of mystery.

"I don't like you to be so silent, Margaret," again began Mrs. Percival: "it always makes me think you are ill; and I am fond of cheerfulness in the morning."

"I did not mean not to be cheerful, mamma," replied Margaret. "I was only thinking."

"Yes, my dear; but think in your own room, that is the proper place for it. People should talk, not think, at breakfast time."

"And not read the papers, I suppose," said Dr. Percival, turning the large sheet of the news-

paper. "But, my dear Julia, it won't do; no time for the *Times* like the present time. Do you see, Sutherland, what a commotion there has been in Tipperary?"

"A murder, as usual?" enquired Mr. Sutherland, gravely.

"Which is a mere nothing," observed Agatha. "Mrs. St. Aubyn told me the other day that when she was there, she became quite used to them."

"It is a curious fact how much less one does think of an Irish murder than of any other," said Mr. Sutherland. "One instinctively fancies some extenuating circumstances."

"I don't see any here, though," replied Dr. Percival. "A most cold-blooded proceeding as was ever heard of. I see the whole district is in an extremely disturbed state. The Government are going to send troops over."

"Not Craven's regiment, I hope?" said Margaret.

"I don't know; it does not say. But it will do him no harm; there will be no fighting."

"We shall hear if it is so," said Mrs. Percival, not quite participating in her husband's nonchalance. "Just see, is it mentioned no where else?"

Dr. Percival put the paper into her hand, drank his cup of tea hastily, and walked to the window.

"The postman ought to be here by this time; I can't wait any longer. We really must make some new arrangement."

"I have spoken about it, my dear," replied Mrs. Percival. "Margaret, I told you to call at Salter's yesterday, and say that he must be more punctual." Margaret's blush showed that she had forgotten. "So like you, Margaret; there is no dependence upon you. I do wish, Henry, you would talk to

her a little about attention. No one has any influence over her besides."

Margaret had a peculiar sensation of shame when reproved before her uncle, and her colour deepened. It was humiliating to be spoken to as a child in the presence of the only person who appreciated her justly.

"We will go to school together, Margaret," said Mr. Sutherland, laughingly: "I don't know which wants it most."

"Margaret is really trying," said Mrs. Percival. "Harriet's copy-book was not sent for yesterday; and Philip came to me before dinner to tell me there had been a whip forgotten which was to have been bought for him. It is such a bad example to the children."

Grace and Harriet were sitting in a distant corner of the room, learning, or pretending to learn, some lessons. Their breakfast had been over an hour before; but it was their privilege to come in and out of the room as they pleased, at this particular time.

"And Margaret did not find my scissors, mamma," said Grace, looking up: "I lent them to her the day before yesterday."

"Dreadfully careless!" muttered Mrs. Percival. "Never mind, my dear; go on with your lesson, she will find them by and by."

The trial of temper was such as Margaret had anticipated. It was not the actual complaint which she disliked, for she knew that it was deserved; but the manner in which it was made; and especially, the allowing a child like Grace to join in the reproach.

"Your scissors are in my basket, Grace," she said, in a tone which only Mr. Sutherland under-

stood: "you had better go up stairs and fetch them."

Grace went, and Mrs. Percival again commenced her lectures upon neatness, to which Harriet was an attentive listener. Margaret sat humble and silent; and every one felt awkward, except Mrs. Percival. Even Dr. Percival at last thought that the subject had been sufficiently discussed; and, seeing no signs of the postman, was going to leave the room, when the letters were brought in.

"Four for me, two for you, Julia, and one for Margaret; from Craven, I think."

The letters were distributed; and Margaret, taking hers, was about to retire that she might read it alone, when Mrs. Percival, looking up, exclaimed, "Don't go, my love. We all want to know what Craven says. Read it out." Margaret sat down again, but she did not begin to read. The first few lines of her brother's letter showed her that it was not intended for the public eye.

"My dear Margaret,

"We are off for Ireland, instanter. I thought it would be so, but it has come at an awkward moment. My father really treats me very shabbily: do tell him so. A hundred pounds at this moment would not settle all my affairs comfortably; yet I am not a whit more extravagant than others — less so indeed. Many men call me shamefully economical — keep this to yourself. I must manage as I can now, but I can't go on in this way. Do stir my father up — you and Agatha can do any thing with him. Ireland will be fun, and nothing more; so don't let my mother be frightened. If it were not for this perpetual torment about money matters, I should like the change well enough. I shall write to my father when we get there. I can do it

better when the sea is between us. Love to all. I heard a flaming account of George the other day from an Eton man. I suspect he is destined to support the family honour, after all; at least, I am sure I shan't.

"Yours affectionately,
"CRAVEN PERCIVAL."

"Well! Margaret; we are waiting," said Mrs. Percival, deliberately folding her own notes.

Margaret's eyes were fixed upon the unfortunate letter. She did not dare say that it was private. "Craven writes very hurriedly," she replied; "but he is going to Ireland."

"Is he indeed? when does he sail? Dr. Percival, do you hear? Craven is going."

"Very probably, my dear: it will do him no harm. What does he say about it, Margaret?"

"Only that he is going, and that he likes it. He does not mention the day. He sends his love, and tells me he will write to you, papa, when he gets there. Oh! and besides, he mentions that he heard what he calls a flaming account of George the other day, from some one who had been at Eton."

Mrs. Percival was growing impatient. "But what does he say? Read it, my dear; read it: you can have no secrets."

Margaret turned from one page to another, and was still silent.

"Very strange!" observed Mrs. Percival; "is any thing the matter?"

"No; he is quite well, I believe, and he is pleased at the change; but ——"

"A little private matter, I suppose," said Mr. Sutherland, lightly. "Brothers and sisters will have such sometimes: witness our memories, Julia."

"Indeed! my memory witnesses to nothing of the kind," remarked Mrs. Percival, coldly. "I can't understand it. I have no notion of children's having any secrets from their parents; you may tell Craven so, Margaret. I suppose you intend writing to him upon this important business by to-day's post."

Margaret made a reply which no one heard; and, hiding the obnoxious epistle in her hand, hastened away. Agatha followed, and of course increased Mrs. Percival's displeasure; and it required all Mr. Sutherland's soothing gentleness, and Dr. Percival's indifference, to convince her that, when arrived at an age to judge and act for themselves, brothers and sisters may sometimes be allowed to interchange letters without the inspection of their parents. Agatha's curiosity was as little satisfied as her mother's. Margaret declined saying any thing more than she had already done; and, locking the letter in her desk, answered it by entreating her brother to be careful in his expenditure, as she was certain her father would not increase his allowance, and begging him on no account to write to her again upon any subject which could not be mentioned to every one. And so the first germs of a confidence, which might have been turned to much good, were destroyed. Margaret, though inexperienced in the ways of the world, saw clearly that Craven's reckless good nature was leading him into mischief; and she thought that her influence, however slight, might possibly be of some avail in checking his career of folly: but her mind revolted from deception, and without it there could be no hope, under her mother's system of supervision of keeping up any thing like an unreserved intercourse.

The contents of the letter did not then particularly weigh upon her spirits. Her brother had often before complained openly of being distressed for money, and Dr. Percival had written angry letters, and afterwards paid his bills. So she supposed it would be now. That there should be any difficulty in the matter, was an idea which never suggested itself, for her father's profession appeared an inexhaustible mine of wealth; and, turning from the consideration of an affair in which she felt herself helpless, Margaret proceeded to her usual duties.

CHAPTER VI.

The schoolroom on this day assumed a new aspect under the influence of a trifling change of management. Margaret put aside her novel, though she had reached the most interesting part of the third volume. She had only read it at intervals before, but it distracted her attention, and the children took advantage of her absence of mind to be negligent. Her temper was not so much tried when she gave herself up fully to the task before her; and even Grace, after venting some petulant feelings, by reminding Margaret that "she ought not to find fault, because Mamma declared she was extremely careless herself," became sobered by finding that a watchful eye was over her.

Mr. Sutherland looked into the school room as the luncheon hour approached; and there was a simultaneous rush towards him from the three children. Grace tried to jump up to his neck; Philip begged to be taken for a ride on his back; whilst Harriet stood at a little distance, holding in her hand a drawing, which Margaret had just told her was particularly well done. Mr. Sutherland playfully shook the little ones off; promised them a game of romps in the garden; paused to examine Harriet's drawing, and assure her that she was making progress; and then went up to Margaret. She was busy in marking the conduct books, and did not look up till she had finished. Mr. Sutherland examined the grammars and dictionaries; and, when the registers were put aside, he said, "I shall be afraid

to intrude again if you are so very orderly. I thought you did not care for interruptions."

"I don't sometimes," said Margaret; "but you know"— and she smiled gaily, yet with an expression of serious thought,—"there are such things as reformations."

"Yes; very necessary they are in some cases:— don't quarrel with me: I mean nothing personal, except to myself. But the reformation is not to last all day, I suppose; you will go for a walk with me this afternoon."

"If I can, of course. I never refuse that; yet what shall we do with the children?"

Mr. Sutherland gave a merry glance at Philip, and threatened to lock him up; and immediately there followed a torrent of entreaties that they might all go together "to the river, for Philip to sail his boat."

"And you and I to discuss metaphysics!" said Mr. Sutherland, drawing Margaret aside: "no, that will never do; we must make some better arrangement." Margaret looked blank.

"The children must be attended to," she said; "and there is no one to take them out but me. Mamma will not often trust them with the servants."

"I suppose she is right; but if we have them with us, can you keep them in order?"

"Impossible, quite,—you have no idea of the labour. As to authority I have none."

"Influence then."

"Still less," said Margaret. "What can influence do with children? They have no mind to understand it."

"Oh, Margaret, what an assertion! I must make you retract."

"Well," acknowledged Margaret, laughing, "I

suppose they have, like the rest of the world, only I never found it out."

"Harriet, Grace, Philip," cried Mr. Sutherland; they gathered round him instantly:—"You all want to go for a walk with me this afternoon, don't you?" There was an eager exclamation,—"yes, yes, delightful!" but Mr. Sutherland held up his finger for silence. "The misfortune is, that our wishes don't entirely agree; that is, I should like a walk with you very much, if I did not want to talk to Margaret; but when you make a noise and jump about, talking is out of the question."

"We won't interrupt, we will be very quiet, uncle Henry," said Harriet, drawing nearer to him.

"How can I be sure?

"Promise, promise, we'll all promise," said Grace.

"No, not promise, because promises are serious things; but sometimes I try to please you, don't I?"

"Yes, very often indeed!" Philip's voice was the loudest, and his little round face was put up for a kiss.

"Always," said Harriet.

"Well, now, I am sure you will like to please me in return: so, to-day, if you choose, we will go out together; but Margaret and I must walk alone; and we will not go to the river, because we should be thinking all the time that you would tumble in and be drowned; which would be unpleasant to you, and give us the trouble of picking you up again: are you very disappointed, Philip?"

"Not very;" but there was a flush on Philip's cheek, which contradicted his words.

"We will go, I think, to the Ashington meadows, continued Mr. Sutherland, "where Margaret and I can walk round and round, and you can play in the middle. But then, remember, you are not to run

up to us every minute, but to let us be quite to ourselves. Now, who will do this?"

"I, I, I," was repeated hastily.

"Try to do it, I mean," said Mr. Sutherland: "do it to please me?" He paused, and looked round.

"I won't come up once, uncle," said Harriet.

Mr. Sutherland patted her head: "and Grace will not, I am sure; and Philip, I know, likes to be good-natured; and perhaps to-morrow we may manage to go down to the river."

Philip's eyes sparkled; and Grace whispered, "I like to be good-natured too, to uncle Henry."

"Every one likes it," said Margaret.

The compact was sealed by a kiss, and the children began to put the room in order with a proud feeling of satisfaction at having it in their power to confer a favour.

Margaret sighed as she went up stairs. Why could not she govern in the same way? There might be something in the rareness of Mr. Sutherland's visits; and that he was never called on to punish them; but she was certain this was not all: and something in the tone of Harriet's voice when she agreed that her uncle always tried to please them, had struck her as a reproach. Margaret was not unkind to them, but she could not say that she had often put herself out of the way for their gratification.

She was dressed for her walk, and just going to join her uncle in the garden till the children were ready, when a knock and ring at the door announced a visitor. Agatha was at home, so she was not afraid of being detained, though she stayed in her room that there might be no meeting on the stairs. The measure was an imprudent one. Agatha had no objection to some visitors, but she was not fond of making her society too common;

and, having observed from the window the entrance of Miss Debrett at the gate, immediately vacated the drawing-room. Miss Percival was no where to be found when her mother sent for her, and Miss Margaret received a summons instead.

"So excessively tiresome!" she exclaimed, as she passed her uncle on the stairs; "I shall be kept waiting half an hour at least."

"Never mind, we will wait."

"But the beauty of the afternoon will be gone; and really Agatha ought to have a little consideration: she makes me see every one."

Mr. Sutherland did not suggest either patience or charity: he hoped that Margaret would soon learn to do this for herself. "I don't dislike Miss Debrett," he said, "though I know it is the fashion to do so."

"You never dislike any one; but she is intensely wearisome."

"Yes, possibly; yet I am not sure but it depends upon the view you take of her—whether your mental telescope is adjusted to the right focus for seeing her excellencies."

"And if there are none to see."

Mr. Sutherland turned away with a smile.

"We always differ upon the premises," he said, and he ran down stairs. Margaret waited for an instant to consider what he meant, and then entered the drawing-room. Miss Debrett came forward to meet her, both hands extended. She was a middle-aged, sickly-looking, lady-like person; with light, almost flaxen hair, tolerably good features, and a rather pensive expression of countenance: whether caused by mental or bodily suffering could not be exactly determined. Both might have had their share, for Miss Debrett's life had been one of great trial, from the loss of friends, and was now embittered by loneliness and general ill health. She was

one of the stray atoms of society, and had attached herself to Dr. Percival's family because she was unable to depend upon herself either for diversion or occupation. To lean upon something was one of the great needs of her nature; and whether it were a mother, a brother, a sister, a favourite servant, or, as it chanced to be, an old acquaintance, signified little, so long as her anxious, doubtful mind could be at rest. Mrs. Percival had just that sort of regard for her which she would have had for any thing that she could govern at will. She pitied her whilst finding amusement in her weaknesses; and Miss Debrett, in simple unconsciousness that any thing was passing in the world beyond what actually came before her senses, called Mrs. Percival her dearest friend, and confided to her all her petty worries, in the fond belief that they were listened to by a willing sympathising ear.

"Ah! my dear," she said, as, to Margaret's annoyance, she kissed her cheek, and carefully scrutinized her countenance; "what an age it seems since I have seen you! — you are looking delightfully well."

"I met you in Staunton the day before yesterday, I think," said Margaret.

"Did you, my love? — oh, now, I remember! I was passing Drayton, the haberdasher's, looking at his new ribbons; but I was very ill, — very ill, indeed, that day. You won't think it unkind that I forgot, will you? — you are quite certain, now?"

Margaret assured her it was perfectly natural: she often did the same; but the tone was not sufficiently energetic to be satisfying.

"Yes, it must seem unkind; but you don't know me. Such dear old friends! — the best I have; how could I ever be ungrateful to them!"

"The last thing any one would accuse you of," said Margaret. "But I hope you are better to-day."

"A little, thank you. I was not out yesterday. I was worried about Jenkins. She had a friend to see her, and went out for a walk."

"There can be no harm in that," said Mrs. Percival.

"No harm, exactly, but they say she is going to be married; and then what shall I do?"

"Not worry yourself before the time," observed Mrs. Percival.

"No, to be sure, you are right there. Still it comes across me sometimes; however, I won't think about it, if I can help it. Margaret, my dear, you have not told me about all your gaiety. You dined at the rectory yesterday."

"Yes," replied Margaret, "papa and mamma, Agatha and myself."

"Very pleasant it was, I dare say. Mr. Stanley is such a good-hearted man; and Mrs. Stanley is so very attentive."

"They are extremely good-natured people," said Margaret.

"And I hear they give such handsome dinners. Mrs. Stanley asked me once; but, you know, it would not suit me. My poor shattered frame was not made for dinner parties; so I told her, and she was kind enough to excuse it quite readily. And whom had you there, my dear?"

Margaret enumerated the guests.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn! — well, that was grand. I did not know they visited. And Colonel Clive too! How did Agatha look?"

Miss Debrett's face was lighted up by a meaning expression, and she looked steadily at Mrs.

Percival, contrary to her usual habit of casting wandering, nervous glances about her.

"Agatha looked very well," said Mrs. Percival; "but why do you ask?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing; though we are such old friends, I don't mean to be angry because you won't let me into every secret."

Margaret laughed; "you mean that Colonel Clive admires Agatha, I suppose? I should think it a very safe admiration on both sides: a man of fifty, and a girl of nineteen."

"Colonel Clive is eight-and-forty, Margaret," said Mrs. Percival.

"The two years cannot make much difference," continued Margaret, "and such a man, too, — a furious temper!"

"Ah! but love, my dear, love does wonders," said Miss Debrett. "I never despair of any temper when a man is in love."

"No, not when he is in love; but what is to be done afterwards, when the love has sobered down?"

"I have not heard any one else say that Colonel Clive has a furious temper, Margaret," said Mrs. Percival: "it must be one of your exaggerations."

Margaret was a little conscience-stricken, and acknowledged that "furious" was rather a strong term, but it was not a good temper, that was certain.

"Ah! well, we can't have every thing in this world," philosophised Miss Debrett. "Ashington is a beautiful place. I shall like to see my dear Agatha mistress of it."

"Nay," said Mrs. Percival, whose good taste made her object to open inferences on such a subject, however she might cherish the idea in secret; "I must beg you to be careful; it is really a mere

fancy of yours, without foundation. Considerable mischief is done by coupling young"——Margaret's smile was expressive, and she checked herself,—"any persons' names together."

"Well, I won't say any thing, if you dislike it; but I may think—you won't mind that?"

The question was put with the serious intention of giving up the thought likewise, if necessary; but Mrs. Percival's veto did not extend beyond the lips, and Miss Debrett continued,—

"Great changes there will be all around the neighbourhood soon, I suspect; not that they will signify to me, a poor, weak invalid. But I shall like to know that Henningsley is inhabited."

"Henningsley!" repeated Mrs. Percival, in surprise; "I suppose it is only one of the old reports."

"Much more than that; surveyors or architects, or something, have been down, looking at it; so Jenkins tells me. She met one of them yesterday in Staunton; he was purchasing drawing-paper at Locke's, the stationer. Jenkins went there to buy me some envelopes; some of those, you know, which you have at sixpence a hundred."

"But about the architect?" said Margaret, who for once was interested in Miss Debrett's communications.

"Oh, nothing about him, except that when he went out Jenkins asked one of the shop-boys, a cousin of hers, who he was, and said it was a strange face; and then she heard all about it."

"About Henningsley you mean, I suppose?" said Margaret, "what is to be done with it?"

"Why, that is the secret, my dear; nobody knows. If I had been pretty well, I intended to have gone into Staunton this afternoon, to call on the Priors; he being the agent, I suppose, is likely to have heard."

"The wisest thing would be to pull it down," said Mrs. Percival.

"Oh! mamma," began Margaret, but Miss Debrett interrupted—

"It won't be pulled down, that I am nearly certain of. Jenkins's cousin said that there was some notion of the Italian Countess,—I don't know her name,—coming to live there."

"Very unlikely, indeed," said Mrs. Percival, decidedly.

"You think so, do you? Well, perhaps it is not probable; but I won't mention it, if you consider it better not. If she were to come, I suppose she would not visit much, being a foreigner."

"Scarcely that," said Margaret, "considering her English parentage."

"And her birth-place, too," added Miss Debrett, "I remember quite well when she was born. You don't, my dear Mrs. Percival, I suppose; you must have been in Dorsetshire at the time. And you don't either, Margaret: you were not born yourself."

"I remember hearing of it," said Mrs. Percival; "I was in the neighbourhood."

"Were you? How very strange! so was I. I was quite young then, Margaret; though, perhaps, you would hardly believe it: such a wreck as I am."

"It must be eight-and-twenty years ago," said Mrs. Percival.

"Yes, just that; eight-and-twenty years this April. Ah! many things have happened since then."

Miss Debrett sighed, and it was a sigh with which Margaret could always sympathise. There was a tale of a deserted home—sickness, and sorrow, and loneliness, which, though often repeated, never failed to awaken kindly feelings

whenever it was alluded to; and she might have learned much from the tone in which one whom she looked upon as in every way her inferior, added: "but we must not complain —I am sure I ought not — so many comforts as I have, and such dear friends."

There was a silence; and Margaret, notwithstanding her compassion, hoped that Miss Debrett would take leave; but the duties of friendship had not yet been fulfilled. Enquiries were to be made for every individual member of the family, Craven amongst the number, and Margaret watched the expression of her mother's face, as she replied in answer to the question where he was:—

"Oh! in Ireland, I believe; but he is not communicative—Margaret can tell you most."

Miss Debrett applied to her as a matter of course; but she had less interest in Craven than in any other of her dear friends. She was afraid of him. He did not scruple openly to turn her into ridicule.

Margaret related, in few words, all that was necessary, and heard in return that some one had seen him in town, and said he was a very fine young man, and that some one else had protested he was a generous, noble-hearted fellow, and gave capital dinners to his brother officers.

The words made very different impressions upon the listeners. Mrs. Percival drank them in with all a mother's pride; but Margaret, after the first glow of sisterly feeling, found that they rested painfully on her mind, and aroused a misgiving as to whether a handsome person might not be an incentive to selfish vanity, and whether the generosity and the capital dinners might not be in some way connected with extravagance. Still Craven was her brother, and till lately she had been accus-

tomed to look up to him. It was not easy to descend at one step from admiration to censure.

Miss Debrett's interest in the Percival family was at length satisfied. She had heard a good report of all, even of little Juliet's bruised elbow,—occasioned by falling down stairs; and after another hearty shake of the hand, and, to Margaret's annoyance, another kiss, she departed, and Margaret hastened to join her uncle. Agatha met her in the garden, and begged for a quarter of an hour's conversation; but Margaret excused herself, unless the business was very pressing. Agatha could not say that it was; but she hinted that her sister would lose a good deal by not remaining to hear. Margaret, however, considered a walk with her uncle a greater loss than any of Agatha's mysteries were likely to be; and finding that the same endeavours to rouse her curiosity were to be used which she had resisted on the preceding evening, assured Agatha that she would listen patiently to all she had to say on her return, and then hurried her uncle away to escape any further delay.

CHAPTER VII.

THE children's promise was resolutely maintained. Philip looked back rather longingly every now and then; but he was kept in order by Harriet; and when the Ashington meadows were reached, and they were allowed to run about at will, there was not the same temptation to appeal continually to "Uncle Henry." Margaret was not much inclined for conversation at first—she enjoyed her uncle's presence, and was quite contented to be leaning on his arm, certain that he was sharing her pleasure. Silence is a great advance in intimacy and unreserve, especially in a pretty country on a beautiful day in Spring, and few observations, except a short account of Miss Debrett's visit, were made by either, till they seated themselves on a bank at the upper end of a steep field, commanding a view of the church and village of Deering in the foreground; and behind, the castellated walls, and grotesque turrets of Henningsley, standing out boldly beneath a wooded ridge of hills. Mr. Sutherland was the first to speak, and he said what every Englishman would have said on a similar occasion, "A most delicious day certainly."

"Most delicious," replied Margaret; and there was silence again.

Mr. Sutherland took off his hat, and indulged in a pleasant reverie, and Margaret watched the shadows upon the distant hills, and wondered whether it would ever be possible to paint them.

"The children are good children, really," said

Mr. Sutherland, as he noticed them playing together.

"I did not think they would have been so careful."

"You don't know your own power: they would do any thing for you."

"I scarcely know why that should be — they see little enough of me. It seems more probable that they have nice dispositions."

"Tolerable. — Grace is a sad torment; the others would be very fair if they were well managed."

"If? Are they not well managed?"

"You are laughing at me," said Margaret; "but I don't care. It was absurd to imagine that I was ever equal to such an undertaking: how could I know any thing about it?"

"Who does know?" said Mr. Sutherland.

"Yes, who does? I very often wonder; for I never see any practice that I approve of; and books on education are so dull, that they are not readable."

"They are so true, generally," said Mr. Sutherland, smiling.

"And my mind instinctively turns from truth, I am sure," continued Margaret: "you know, as a child, how I would read story books instead of the Roman History."

"I don't think any one likes copy-book truths," observed Mr. Sutherland; "and the reason is, I suspect, that they are not truths; they don't go deep enough."

"Unknown depths there are in children's minds," said Margaret; "I have a clear remembrance of some in my own."

"Then cherish them; they will teach you more than any books. What we want is, the history of a child's mind, not from theories, but facts. We

cannot see into the minds of the children about us; and, in general, we never begin to think what our own were till we are so old as to have forgotten. Your age is just the one for making observations on education."

"But I suppose you have a theory like the rest of the world," said Margaret.

"I have, to a certain extent; not like the bed of Procrustes, upon which every mind is to be stretched."

"And the fundamental principle is what?"

"That a child must be ruled by sight; which is not a very wise or deep-sounding one — is it?"

"I don't know; but it is not what I should have expected from you."

"There is nothing new in it," said Mr. Sutherland; "it is merely the old maxim of example before precept; perhaps I should carry it out farther than some would. There is nothing to which it may not apply."

"Of course one tries to set a good example," said Margaret.

"That is, you don't get into passions or tell stories; but there must be something beyond that."

"Illustrations, please," said Margaret; "you know of old that I can't endure generalities."

"Well! then what do you say to this? I have seen a party collected round a fire on a cold winter's evening; the governess taking her place in the warm corner, and the children quarrelling amongst each other which should stand nearest. There has come a lecture upon selfishness in consequence. Now, suppose the governess had moved,—which would have been the most efficacious, deeds or words?"

"But to give up to children always," exclaimed Margaret; —"to put them first! that can't be right."

"Pardon me, I said nothing about always. Be as exacting as you choose for other persons, but as self-denying as you can for yourself, remembering always to uphold your own authority at the same time, by insisting upon implicit obedience. Besides, children have a clear perception of the difference between what they may claim as a right, and what is granted as a favour. Make them obey and respect you, and they will always put you first."

"Ah! but how to make them respect you!" said Margaret.

"They will readily, if they see you just and consistent, acting out what you teach. I mean in this way,—you wish a child to be attentive, therefore your whole attention must be wholly given to the lesson before you; there must be no indulging in dreams, no taking up stray books: if you do, your words will be thrown away. Shall I go on?"

"Yes, pray do. I dare say I shall be self-convicted; but never mind."

"Then, again, you require obedience; but you must first practise it. The best example, of course, is that of obedience to the Church and your parents, but even when the laws are of your own creating: they are laws, and that is sufficient. They must be adhered to, unless for some very cogent reason, simply as an example of obedience. If they are altered, others must be substituted. It is the sort of living 'from hand to mouth,' with rules made for every emergency, and none fixed, which ruins a child's idea of government. Punctuality is an admirable thing for this reason; because it is an external command to which they see you give way."

"The copy-books say it is the soul of business," said Margaret.

"Yes, that is a specimen of what I mean by a copy-book truth not going deep enough. Sincerity is another thing insisted on in children; yet I have seen persons shuffle, and delay, and make any excuses, in order to conceal their ignorance. If you don't know a thing, say you don't. A child's natural opinion of your superiority will not be at all shaken by it. And so in confidence; if you wish to receive it, you must show it. Children will have secrets: let them come to you, and tell you that they have them; that they had rather you would not know what they are talking of. Let them receive and write letters as they choose, as long as you know who the correspondents are. There is nothing gained by the opposite course: if the secrets are not allowed openly, they will be had privately."

"Yes," said Margaret, remembering the morning's letter from her brother, "that is quite true."

"But all this is so old," said Mr. Sutherland: "after all, one can but talk truisms."

"They are not truisms to me," said Margaret; "if I knew them, I did not think about them."

"Shall I mention politeness, then?" continued Mr. Sutherland.—"I was present at an amusing scene the other day at a luncheon table, when the children's dinner was going on at the same time: there was a perpetual 'do this,' and 'do that;' and 'don't eat too fast,' and 'hold your knife and fork straight;' and all the while the lady, I don't know whether she was an aunt or a governess, was reaching across the children, and helping them without the least nicety; making them feel, in fact, that there was a complete difference between the decorum required of them and the grown-up party. What they saw, and what they heard, were entirely at variance."

"I always thought education a very self-denying task," said Margaret.

"If it is not, I am sure it can never succeed," replied Mr. Sutherland.

"But you have been keeping principally to externals," said Margaret; "you would think religion the chief thing: how would you teach that?"

"Precisely in the same way. A child's religion is reverence. Be reverent yourself, and you will do more than a hundred sermons."

"How reverent?" enquired Margaret. "I don't see that it is possible to be otherwise."

"Reverent in forms and outward observances, I mean," said Mr. Sutherland.

The words "how like a Romanist" rose to Margaret's lips; but the allusion was one which her uncle never permitted to be made in jest.

"I am right, I am sure," he continued; "and I will give you an instance, since you must have illustrations. A friend of mine was one day hearing her little girl repeat a hymn or the catechism, I forget which; she was accustomed to put down her work whilst the child said it; it was simply a feeling of reverence in her own mind, and she had never made a remark upon the subject; but the child observed it, and said, 'I know why you do that, mamma; you don't like us to repeat sacred things when you are working, just as we should any others.'"

Margaret seemed struck by the idea, because, though simple, it was practical.—"You would be more particular than I am," she said.

"Possibly I might be, because I am more alive to the influence of actions. I would never let a child put any thing upon a Bible, or repeat hymns in play, or say grace when people were talking, or lounge at prayers; and I would rather read the Bible to him than allow him to read it for himself:

certainly I would never permit it to be made a lesson book. But really, Margaret, these things are so obvious, I am half ashamed to mention them."

"Never mind," replied Margaret; "they are details, and they suit me; that is, they do me good."

"I think by these means you would give a tone to a child's mind," continued Mr. Sutherland; "as for any thing beyond,—it is not in our power. Prayer is our only hope there."

"But you would explain the Bible, would you not?" enquired Margaret.

"Yes, at a certain time every day, making it totally distinct from every other lesson, and not allowing any one to join in it whose conduct had been particularly faulty. At those times I would read it aloud myself, and then catechise upon the facts, collecting all I could to make them interesting. I mean illustrations of manners and customs, and coincidences in profane history."

"Yet that sort of information is scarcely the object for which we read," observed Margaret.

"If it were not one object, why should the Bible have been given to us in its present form?—why is it not a code of laws, or a bare statement of facts?—Think besides how much of the Bible is a sealed book to us when we grow up, merely because no light has been thrown upon it when we were young."

"And is that all you would do?" said Margaret, in a tone of disappointment.

"Most assuredly not. I would draw out all the practical lessons I possibly could, and apply them to the little incidents of daily life; but I would avoid warm expressions of my own devotional feelings, and I would be careful how I encouraged children to talk openly of theirs."

"And where would be their confidence in you?" said Margaret.

"Talking is not confidence," replied Mr. Sutherland; "children deceive themselves just as grown-up people do. There are seasons, certainly, when they are under the influence of fear or sorrow, and occasionally (I have known such myself), when conscience is awakened at which they will tell their private thoughts, and truly; but the natural atmosphere of a child's mind on religious subjects is reserve; and if you attempt to force it you may commit the same mistake as in pulling open a rose-bud to make it grow."

"I would not force it on any account," said Margaret.

"You do so unknowingly, if you encourage that pretty-sounding, plausible style of conversation, which some people so delight in. Children are charmed to be taken notice of, and the mere attention with which you listen to them is an incentive to their vanity."

"Then you can know nothing about their minds," said Margaret.

"The question is, whether by such conversation you really do read their minds: whether you do not run the risk of making them unconsciously hypocrites; and whether, in fact, you do not gain a much truer knowledge of them indirectly, than directly."

"How do you mean indirectly?" enquired Margaret."

"By drawing out their opinions; watching them at play; sharing their interests, and so gaining their affections."

"Yes, to gain their affections," said Margaret; "that is the great thing."

"The great thing, undoubtedly: but may I give

you one piece of advice, Margaret? do not think too much about it. Follow the analogy of the material world. We walk straight, but not by looking at the road; we play music correctly, by keeping our eyes on the book, not the notes; we conduct ourselves properly in society by thinking of others, not ourselves; and we gain the hearts of children by following out a strict, yet affectionate line of duty, more than by trying to obtain their confidence, or making them love us."

"Yet it is a great temptation," said Margaret; "one longs so to know what is passing beneath all we see."

"Still rest contented. God is working there; and the fruits will be seen in good time."

"But what is good time?"

"Such an age as fourteen, fifteen, and upwards. Then the mind begins to be formed; and then is the season to throw off the strict rules which are imperative in childhood."

"People do not generally think so," said Margaret. Many are more strict then, than when children are quite little."

"I cannot help considering it a great mistake. I should have more hope, even from over-indulgence at that age. Unfortunately, parents spoil their children in infancy by allowing them to be disobedient, and so they are forced to put them in trammels, just when they long to be free."

"And confidence goes irrecoverably," said Margaret, sighing, as she thought of her mother.

"Yes, if people could but imagine the mischief they do, by not insisting early upon implicit, instantaneous obedience. But it seems scarcely fair for those who are not parents to criticise those who are."

Margaret rose to walk home; but there were

many other points on which she wanted her uncle's opinion, and his ideas seemed cold.

"Would you never have any devotional reading with children?" she said, stopping as she was about to summon Harriet.

"Yes, as an act of worship; or, which is most to be desired, in the daily services of the Church. At night, too, when a child is old enough, I would accustom it to read a psalm, or something of the same kind; but at those times, external circumstances — the assembling of the whole family, or, the sacredness of the building, or the stillness of night, insensibly prepare and touch the feelings: there is no forcing them."

Margaret could not say that she agreed, and her uncle perceived what was passing in her thoughts.

"My notions seem formal," he said; "but I hope I would not for the world encourage any thing of the kind. I only think that religion in a child's mind is a plant nurtured in secret by God. We may dig, and prune, and water it, but we must not hope to discover whether it has taken root except by its fruits. If we take it up, and examine, and analyse its fibres, it will die."

Margaret felt that she had much to think of, and scarcely wished to pursue the conversation. Mr. Sutherland called to the children, and as they ran up, proposed to Margaret a practical lesson on good nature; a story to amuse them part of the way home. Margaret could not deny the request, and giving up her place to Harriet, she tried to act upon Mr. Sutherland's hints by holding a parasol over her, and carrying a root of Forget-me-not, which, by the aid of Philip's knife she had dug up to plant in her garden. Mr. Sutherland's story was ended before they reached home, and again he sent the children

away. To Margaret's surprise there was not a word of discontent.

"That is from a child's sense of justice," he said in answer to her look of wonder: "justice and gentleness will rule a man's world in time, much more a child's."

Margaret agreed, but the latter word came home to her more forcibly than the former. She was not aware of being unjust, but she was certain of not being gentle. Her manner was quick, and her expressions were hasty. Without meaning to be angry, she often repelled and frightened the children, and many times when they would have gone to her with their little griefs and joys, they were deterred by the dread of the sharp tone in which she would tell them that she was busy, and they must run away. Irritability and confidence can never go together.

CHAPTER VIII.

Agatha's power of secrecy had been sorely tried since the dinner at Deering Parsonage. She longed to impart her intelligence; but her delight in mystery triumphed, and it was not till the dressing bell warned her she had no time to lose, that she put an end to the ingenious hints and quibbles by which, on Margaret's return from her walk, she had endeavoured to stimulate her curiosity. Margaret was at last really as anxious as her sister desired, and entreated that she might be told before they went down to dinner.

"I think you have tired me quite enough, Agatha; so please be good-natured at last."

"I am not sure but what you are destined to be a heroine," said Agatha. "I suspect you would bear the rack if you were put to the trial."

"No, I am sure I should not. I never set up for being anything of the kind."

"But you looked so grand when you turned away last night, and pretended not to care: there — you are doing just the same now."

Margaret was beginning to arrange her hair, for she had no patience to expend upon any further petitions.

"I am going to ring," she said, holding the bell in her hand.

"A threat! a threat!" exclaimed Agatha, in glee. "I am so rejoiced I have brought you to that. But stop, don't ring just this minute: I will fasten your dress. Now, what do you say? — what

should you think of going with Mrs. St. Aubyn for a week's visit to France?"

"You?" said Margaret; "I should think you would enjoy it extremely."

"No, not me only, but you too. Colonel Clive is obliged to go to Rouen about some business of signing papers. He has a friend there who is ill, and cannot come to England; but he is obliged to return immediately; and Mrs. St. Aubyn is so excessively good natured, she has set her heart upon having us both. She said at first that she did not like to ask because of their only being absent a week, and not being able to go further than Rouen, but Colonel Clive urged it."

Margaret's eyes sparkled with pleasure.—"You are not in earnest?" she began.

"Yes, entirely; every word is truth."

"For a week did you say?—to Rouen? How extremely kind!—the place of all others I have longed to see. But, Agatha, what made Mrs. St. Aubyn think of it?"

"I don't know. She wanted a companion, and she is fond of me."

Margaret paused in the middle of her toilette to endeavour to realise the proposed enjoyment. "But papa and mamma," she said; a slight distrust checking the previous delight; "what do they think about it."

"Oh! they are charmed.—To tell you the whole truth, it is to be Colonel Clive's treat to us. He insists upon it, and Mrs. St. Aubyn will not consent to take us on any other conditions."

"The world must belie Colonel Clive after all," said Margaret; "that very cross face of his never would make one give him credit for such kindness."

Agatha only smiled; and having finished dressing her sister, ran off to her own room. There was a

bright sunshine over Margaret's world at that moment; brighter than it had been for many months. To escape the children, and their lessons, and all the worries of home, and to see a foreign country for the first time, without a care but that of amusing herself! At eighteen, who would not have been happy at such a prospect, even though the pleasure were only to last for a week, and not to include Paris? Travelling, foreign travelling especially, had been one of her day dreams, as it has been that of most persons at some period of their lives. Any want of sympathy in her companions was overlooked, for Margaret had learned to live without sympathy, except when her uncle was with her, and when abroad she was certain that she should need it less than ever. There would be so much to interest, and Agatha would undertake the task of entertainment; and as Margaret satisfied herself with this conviction, a smile stole over her face at the thought of how much Miss Debrett's suspicions would receive confirmation by the intended journey. The home dinner-party was often a trial to her, from the want of congeniality in taste and opinion between herself and her parents; but on this evening every thing was delightful. Mrs. Percival entered warmly into the new idea, and began to plan for her children's comfort; talked of the necessity of carrying very little luggage; and recommended, to Margaret especially, a case with needles, thread, pins, and tape; just such a one as she had taken herself, when she went abroad for her wedding tour. Dr. Percival prophesied amusing disagreeables, and protested that if either of them returned with a taste for French cookery, or French finery, he would never acknowledge them as his daughters; and Mr. Sutherland ransacked his memory for every thing worthy of note in the towns and villages which

they were to pass; and sincerely desired that Mrs. St. Aubyn had extended her invitation to him. Margaret's glance across the table showed how much she responded to the wish. The hour before tea was equally agreeable. For once Margaret had no inclination to study, but gathering the children round her, made them guess what was going to happen; and amused herself with giving rhodomontade answers to their questions; ending, however, by the real and very satisfactory promise of bringing home, if not a cart-load, as Philip wished, at least a large box full of French bonbons.

"We shall all expect presents, Margaret," said Mr. Sutherland, who just then came into the room. "I have been thinking what I should like, but I can't make up my mind. The Church of St. Ouen is the only thing I covet much."

"Bring him a picture of it," whispered Harriet.

"So I will: but I am afraid, if he is covetous, a picture will not satisfy him."

"Uncle Henry is not like the youngest princess," said Grace, holding up a book of fairy tales, which she had been reading; "she didn't want any thing."

"Ah! but then, Grace, that was in fairy times!" exclaimed Mr. Sutherland. "I dare say, now, if the truth were told, that youngest princess was better off than any of her sisters in the end."

"Yes, that she was: she was so rich, and she married such a handsome young prince, and had a palace, Oh! I can't tell how large; a great deal larger than this house."

"Well! that was very pleasant, and all because she was good, and didn't ask. Suppose we don't ask, but say, 'thank you,' for all that Margaret will give us."

"It was not merely because she didn't ask," observed Harriet; "but she was never cross."

"And she loved her papa," continued Grace.

"Extremely good qualities, indeed," said Mr. Sutherland, with mock gravity. "I'm sure I should have been very fond of that youngest princess. Do you think I can ever be like her?"

"O Uncle Henry, how funny!" said Philip: "why you are a man!"

"So I am,—I forgot: but still, I should be glad never to be cross. I think I shall try."

"If you are the youngest princess, Margaret will be the old king," said Grace, laughing with delight at the idea.

"Exactly so. Margaret will be the old king and go to France, and I shall be the youngest princess and stay at home; and you must all be the naughty ones."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed all the children.

"But what is to be done? If I am good, you must be bad."

"No, no; we will all be good," said Harriet.

"All of you?—Grace, and Philip, and you, and I too? That will be making a story of our own."

"So it will!" exclaimed Grace; "we will have a story of our own."

"And all be like the youngest princess, and see how very well we can behave whilst the king is away. Perhaps that will be best. I shall try and learn my lessons perfectly."

"You have not any to learn," said Harriet.

"Yes, I have; a good many that you don't know any thing about. But won't you learn yours, too?"

"Yes, all of them," said Harriet.

"And get up early in the morning," continued Mr. Sutherland; "and not be cross all day, and do just as we are told; and write such beautiful copies without any blots, Philip? I don't think the king

will know us again when he comes back, if he finds we are so much improved."

"The king will be very pleased," said Margaret, looking amused.

"Shall we really try, Uncle Henry?" enquired Harriet.

"To be sure; I mean to do it now. I have a letter to write; and I know the princess, if she was so good, never could have wasted her time; so I am going to begin it directly." Grace tried to stop him, but he went to the table.

"There is Baker come for one of the princesses," said Margaret.

"Not yet, please let me stay a little longer," exclaimed Philip, fretfully.

"Oh! Philip, Philip, that is not at all like her," said Harriet.

"No," remarked Mr. Sutherland; "there can be no doubt that she went to bed directly her nurse came for her."

"And Uncle Henry did what he had to do at once," said Harriet.

"Yes, of course; because we made the agreement."

"Are you really going to try, Uncle Henry?" said Philip, in a changed tone.

"Yes, really. Will you give me a kiss?" Philip threw his arms round his uncle's neck, and after going the round of the rest of the party, went cheerfully to bed. Mr. Sutherland continued writing, and when Harriet and Grace tried to interrupt him, he persisted in declaring that he could not break his word; he had said he meant to be good, and so he really must be: and the little girls were at length half puzzled by his manner.

"I do think Uncle Henry is trying," said Grace, as Baker appeared again at the door, and without

delay she prepared to depart. Mr. Sutherland smiled, and Margaret read the smile, and thought of the conversation of the afternoon. It was a specimen of the government of sight.

The play of the preceding evening was not allowed to be forgotten the next day, nor on any other before Mr. Sutherland returned to Alton; and by that time he had contrived so fully to impress it upon the children's minds, that they had learned to remind each other of it, and to exercise a control amongst themselves. It was now often a matter of ambition — which should give the least trouble; and although the improvement could not be expected to be invariable, or very permanent, yet at that time it was a particular assistance to Margaret. A week's travelling, especially in a foreign country, involves almost as much of preparation as a month's; and independently of this, Margaret's mind was, in spite of herself, unsettled. It was disagreeable to find that she could not fix her attention to study — that her thoughts would never remain bent upon any one subject; but it was painful to discover how much her late impressions of seriousness had vanished. The world was delightful now, and there seemed but little necessity to seek for comfort in any thing beyond. Happily, Margaret's sincerity saved her from entire forgetfulness. She had begun to practise directly her feelings were aroused; and the practice remained when the feelings had subsided. The soul of religion was sleeping, but it was not dead. Her prayers were still said more carefully, and her Bible was regularly read. Work was also undertaken at the children's lessons, instead of desultory writing or reading; and this habit of submitting to a law, though one imposed by herself, was the germ of that obedience which she afterwards paid to a higher authority upon higher principles.

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. St. Aubyn was during this week more constant than ever in her visits to the Grove; and notwithstanding Margaret's weariness in her society, she could not be insensible to her kindness.

If however she had been envious, her bad feelings would have been easily awakened; for whatever attentions were bestowed, Agatha was clearly their origin and object. Her taste was consulted, her opinion required; and Margaret, though listened to politely, was placed completely in the back-ground. Colonel Clive frequently accompanied her sister, and there could be no doubt of the attraction; but Margaret was still unsuspicious. His manners were stiff, and his irritability scarcely hidden by his marked preference of every thing with which Agatha was connected. He was a man grown prematurely old — without occupation, and having no taste for literature, and subject in consequence to perpetual fits of ennui. He had sold out of the army, and, not understanding country pursuits, entrusted the care of his property to a bailiff; contented in the mean time to enjoy the rental, and spend his time in driving about Staunton, and paying visits with his sister. His great talent lay in finding fault, and this, with his defect of temper, made his society so unpleasant, that Margaret's delight even in her French journey was occasionally damped by knowing that he would be of the party. She was obliged frequently to remind herself that the plan was of his contriving,

and that it was ungrateful to wish him away; but Agatha required no reminding. A curious blindness appeared suddenly to have affected her mental perceptions. She did occasionally yawn and express herself very weary after an hour's conversation with the Colonel upon the weather, and the state of the roads, and who had been seen, and who had not been seen; but if a remark upon her fatigue were made, she had no fault to find. It was not Colonel Clive; he had talked a great deal, and very agreeably; but the day was warm, or she had been up late the night before: an excuse was always ready; and if she could not make it, her mother could. Mrs. Percival did not at first know what she was doing, for she seldom realised her own projects, and had formed no particular scheme for her daughter's marriage. But she liked the acquaintance with Mrs. St. Aubyn; and she was glad to have it said that a man of fortune and consideration, like Colonel Clive, was fascinated by Agatha's beauty. It was vanity which made her at first cultivate the acquaintance, and it was her subjection to the world, and the world's opinion, which induced her to soften down any unfavourable opinion she might entertain, and place Mrs. St. Aubyn and her brother in the most advantageous point of view, whenever they were made the subjects of conversation. If, when originally introduced to them, she had been asked whether Colonel Clive was a person likely to make Agatha happy in marriage, she would have ridiculed the idea. The great disparity of age and his glaring defects of temper would then have stood prominently forward; but it was her interest to overlook them, and to dwell only upon the advantages of his wealth and position, and unintentionally she was teaching her daughter to do the same.

There is a government of sight for girls of nineteen as well as for children of nine. The generality of minds are formed, not by reading or advice, but by the events which pass before their eyes, and the opinions which are expressed concerning them. Agatha Percival read that it was folly and sin to undertake the most solemn engagement of life without feelings of affection and respect. Even the most trifling novel told her something of this truth. Her father warned her that she was not to listen to the silly flatteries which were constantly poured into her ear, and her mother gave her formal lectures upon the importance of marriage, and the care and consideration which ought to be exercised before entering upon it. No one said to her that wealth was "the one thing needful;" but many said it before her, and, as must almost invariably happen, Agatha turned from the instructions immediately addressed to herself, and eagerly gathered in the passing observations, which, like straws upon the surface of a river, show the direction of the current beneath. At her father's dinner table especially, when the topics of the day were brought forward, she heard Colonel Clive envied; and she saw that his riches gave him, in the opinion of her family, a position which he could never have gained by his virtues or his intellect. She observed that Mrs. St. Aubyn's decision was held to be oracular,—that a visit from her was the great event of the day. Of what use could it be to be told that the goods of this world are of secondary consequence, when every thing about her contradicted the assertion? Agatha heard every one wishing for money, and of course, she learned to think that it was the perfection of human desires. But she was not the only person injured by this low tone of conversation. The effect which dinner-table discussions have upon the

characters of those engaged in them may sometimes be seen, and perhaps corrected; but the effect upon the characters of the servants who listen to them is scarcely ever considered.

Mrs. Percival's household heard at church that they were to set their affections "on things above, not on things on the earth;" but they heard on their return home exactly the reverse; not always openly stated, but implied so as not to admit of a mistake. Yet Mrs. Percival never for an instant imagined that her servants could have learned any thing but good from a residence under her roof. And so it is even when the same wishes are expressed carelessly, though from better motives. We may intend to employ our riches for good; but our servants only know that we are longing for them; and if we desire that which our Lord has warned us is a temptation so great as to involve the risk of our eternal salvation, how can we expect but that they will cherish the same inclinations?

The week went swiftly by, and the views which were rapidly maturing in Agatha's mind were unknown, and if they had been perceived would have remained uncensured. All the necessary preparations for the journey were made, and the thoughts of the whole family were directed to the pleasure which Agatha and Margaret were anticipating. Margaret was particularly glad that it had come just at this moment, for there were two things which might otherwise have caused her uneasiness: one was her uncle's departure. He had paid, for him, a very long visit; and it had been more delightful to her than any other, although little more had been said on either side upon the subject which had occupied them on the first day of meeting. Mr. Sutherland was happy in seeing, from Margaret's conduct, that his words had taken some root; and

Margaret felt a daily increasing pleasure in his society as she found herself more able to understand his prevailing habits of thought. "I shall expect you to examine the churches well for my sake," he said, as he stood with his horse's bridle in his hand, whilst Margaret was begging him to come to them immediately upon her return, in order to hear all that she had seen. "Upon the whole I think I am glad you are not going farther this time. You will not be tempted to hurry over Rouen."

"I shall not understand what to admire, I am afraid," said Margaret.

"Yes, you will, — you must. Taste is innate; and I am sure you have a love of the beautiful in all things."

"Moral as well as intellectual, I hope," said Margaret, with a sweet smile. "I shall see nothing I like any where as I do the sight of Prince's head, when I know you are upon his back."

Mr. Sutherland held out his hand in answer. "Good bye, my dear child; you may be sure I shall come if possible;" and mounting his horse, he gave one more parting glance at Margaret, who was standing in the doorway, and rode off. Margaret returned to her employment with a heavy heart, and her other grievances seemed now more weighty. Her father had that morning received a letter from Craven owning the embarrassments which he had before hinted to her. Margaret understood this by a few words which fell from Dr. Percival as he was reading it; and after breakfast she was called into the study to confess all that she knew of the affair. This was little enough; but Dr. Percival, when once excited to anger, was not a man to listen to reason. He complained of Craven, and prophesied that he would be the ruin of his family; and there being no one else present, Margaret came

in for a share of his indignation. "She should have told before, — she was her brother's confidante, and she ought to put a stop to such extravagance. If she did not, the day would come when she would bitterly rue it." Margaret had learned by former experience the best mode of conducting herself on such occasions. Excuses would but add fuel to the fire, so she remained patient and silent, till the ebullition of anger had subsided, and then saying that she was very sorry for having vexed him, asked if she might go to the school-room, as the children were waiting for her. Dr. Percival growled an assent, and Margaret left him in the hope that when they again met the storm would have subsided. She had made, however, one discovery in the course of the conversation, which though it did not rest upon her mind whilst engaged in the morning studies, returned disagreeably after her uncle was gone. Craven had implied to her that his debts did not amount to much more than a hundred pounds; he had sent to his father for three. No wonder that Dr. Percival was angry; and this was not the first offence; similar applications had been made several times before, not perhaps to the same amount, but still sufficient to show that his very handsome allowance was not enough for his expensive habits. Three hundred pounds was a large sum, and Margaret saw no probability of a reformation. Craven had from childhood been generous and reckless. His fine countenance and popular manners had gained him friends wherever he went, and he was unable to forego any extravagance which the world pronounced distinctive of a gentleman. Margaret saw in the distance a constant source of anxiety in her brother's folly; and even the recollection that George, at Eton, was steady and high-principled, and had brought himself frequently into

notice by his superior attainments, did not soothe her ruffled spirits. The prospect of her foreign expedition was more efficacious than reason. She would at least have a week free from home cares, and by that time her father would have recovered the shock. In the mean time she resolved again to dismiss the subject from her thoughts, and to forget, if possible, that the remembrance of Craven was associated with any thing but pleasure.

The carriage which was to convey the travellers to Southampton was punctually at the door at nine o'clock on the morning but one after Mr. Sutherland's departure. There was rather a long journey before them, and they would require some rest at the end of it, as they were to cross at night, and Dr. Percival foretold but little sleep for any one. The day, however, promised well: it was cool, bright, and perfectly calm. Mrs. St. Aubyn and the Colonel were experienced voyagers, and cared little for annoyances, and there was certainly every prospect of a short and agreeable passage. Margaret stepped into the carriage with a light heart. She had provided herself with sufficient resources against hours of ennui in her companions, or the weariness of a rainy day at a French hotel; and whatever might happen in the way of discomfort, she was sure of being contented. One or two books, a sketching block, and some work, armed her against all the minor evils of life. There are few sensations more agreeable than those produced on the first outset of a journey on a summer's morning by the rapid wheel of a carriage, as it bears us along through the clear atmosphere, giving a feeling of exhilaration to the spirits, and a sense of power to the mind. Let the country be mountainous or flat, woody or barren, known or unknown, for the first half hour it will but little signify. The early morn-

ing air, if our minds are disengaged, is sufficient for our enjoyment, and the fact that we are leaving the scenes to which we have been accustomed, invests them with the charm of novelty. We view them under a different aspect, and look upon them with the curious eye of an indifferent spectator. Even the familiar faces which may chance to present themselves, are not the same. Their insipid round of hopes and fears has for the time ceased to be ours, the source of their contentment is a subject of speculation, and we notice them with a smile or a bow, under which is concealed a feeling of triumph that our circle of interests is not to be contracted like theirs. Margaret had never viewed the town of Staunton with so much of charity. She looked out for Miss Debrett's little mansion, standing back from the road in a small neat garden, and was amused to see Jenkins at the wicket gate, evidently stationed to give notice of their approach. She leaned forward as they passed the door, and waved her hand, for Miss Debrett's head appeared above the window-blind, and she was desirous to give the signs of recognition which she knew would be treasured up and recounted at least half a dozen times in the course of the day. Even the sight of Mr. Drayton, putting up in his window the ribbons which had once attracted Miss Debrett's curiosity, created a certain interest; and the civil bow of Mr. Locke, the stationer, was most graciously received. Margaret had not before realised the extent of sympathy which is unconsciously given to all the persons and objects connected with our common life. The party was a cheerful one, and even when the first twenty miles were passed, there was no appearance of a diminution of enjoyment. All had for the time being attained their wishes, and for once all were satisfied; and fatigue was so

little thought of, that after a journey of fifty miles both Margaret and her sister would willingly have escaped a five-o'clock dinner, and an hour's rest, and proceeded at once to the packet. As the moment for treading the shores of another country drew near, all things belonging to England grew tiresome. Agatha was in a passive state of felicity, receiving Colonel Clive's attentions, and amused without exertion. If life could be spent in travelling, she thought he might make a very endurable companion.

The miseries of a sea voyage, however short, and under whatever circumstances of fair winds and calm waters, need no description. On the present occasion they were fewer than usual. Margaret sat upon deck until quite late gazing on the brilliancy of the stars, and the reflection of the moonbeams on the water, without any wish for conversation, and lost in the vague reveries which the novelty of her position occasioned. Mrs. St. Aubyn's entreaties at length persuaded her, though unwillingly, to go into the cabin, and the next nine or ten hours were passed in that dreamy, disturbed, uncomfortable state which is the very best that can ever be expected in such a situation. The dim morning light breaking through the port-holes of the cabin awoke the passengers from their uneasy slumbers. The voyage had been unusually short, and they were then within sight of Havre. Margaret longed to be on deck, but it was some time before she could persuade Mrs. St. Aubyn that it was really a matter of interest to her to watch the entrance of the vessel into the harbour. Mrs. St. Aubyn had seen it so often herself, that for her it had no charm; but when Agatha added her petitions to her sister's, the request was immediately acceded to. It was a strange sight which

greeted Margaret's eye, as she stood looking over the side of the vessel. The narrow harbour, or rather basin, which they were entering, shut in by the old grey walls of the fortifications—the massive round tower of Francis the First, standing as a guard to the port—the tall houses with curious gable ends and projections, looking ghostly in the cold morning light — the broad quay, and the trading vessels and barges lying motionless on the water, their masts appearing to mingle with the chimneys of the houses; all were in singular contrast with the red brick stiffness and squareness of an English town. There were but few people moving about, in consequence of the earliness of the hour, but the gens-d'armes soon came on board to perform their usual office; and the representatives of the different hotels, standing on the quay, vied with each other in extolling, with all the eagerness of French gesticulation, the attraction of their different houses. Margaret's amusement at all she saw was exhibited more by her quick eye and pleased smile than by any open expression. Two of her companions did not in the least enter into her delight, and Agatha seemed more engrossed in collecting her cloak, shawl, reticule, and et-ceteras, than in making remarks upon the scene before her. Even the lady's-maid was an experienced traveller, so that Margaret seemed quite alone in her surprise. The landing, the search at the custom-house, and the short walk to the hotel, were soon over; soon, at least, to Margaret's feelings, for where every thing was new, nothing was tedious; and in half an hour's time she found herself seated in a neat, uncarpeted room, comfortably furnished with a soft sofa, crimson cushioned chairs, and a splendid gilt clock; and quite ready for the coffee, and long rolls of bread, and fresh eggs and butter, which were set

before her. True, the room had, when they first saw it, contained a bed, and a dingy piece of untidy carpet had been spread upon the ground; but the uncoated waiter, and the agile femme-de-chambre, had, with a speed resembling that of Aladdin and the African magician, rolled up the bedding, and carried away the light frame on which it rested, and after kicking aside the carpet, contrived, by means of a huge scrubbing-brush, to give an additional polish to the dusty floor; and by the time the party were ready for breakfast, the apartment had assumed the form of a respectable salon. Colonel Clive's countenance brightened under the influence of comfort and a plentiful repast. Since his landing, even Agatha's smiles had failed to keep him in good humour. Personal discomfort had roused his native irritability; he had quarrelled with the gens-d'armes, abused the custom-house officers, and called the garçon who waited on him "a lazy rascal," for having delayed to bring up his portmanteau, an epithet received with a polite bow and a "Oui, Monsieur, certainement." The Colonel's knowledge of French was not co-extensive with his feelings; he could be amiable, but not angry; and the unfortunate waiter escaped without any further demonstration of enmity, except a low growl. Margaret was an attentive observer of the scene; it was the first specimen of the reported ill-temper, and it was not satisfactory. Agatha did not appear struck by it; she was looking out of the window, watching the departure of a French diligence, and no wonder that her attention was pre-occupied. To English eyes what can be more surprising than the ordinary public conveyance of our polished neighbours? A chariot, a small omnibus, and the body of a stage coach, surmounted by a rickety London cab, with a projecting head, forming but one machine, on

which are piled boxes, hampers, bags, baskets, packages, all the provisions for the wants, imaginary and unimaginary, of the fifteen or sixteen human beings who are located in the different divisions of the cumbrous vehicle; the whole committed to the charge of a grizzly-faced countryman, in a blue smock-frock, who, armed with a long whip, directs the irregular movements of five, six, seven, sometimes nine, or even eleven unmannerly cart horses, linked together by ropes. That a body so ponderous should ever have been invented, is a great marvel; that it should ever have been put in motion, is a greater; but the greatest of all is, that by any art of skill in the driver, or instinct in the horses, it should be brought in safety to the place of its destination. Margaret was rather inclined to try what such a mode of travelling would be like, and half regretted that a carriage was to be engaged for the next day, especially as she had heard that the coupé was by no means to be despised: but Agatha laughed at the idea, and reminded her that they were a party of four. The number recalled Margaret's thoughts to the Colonel and his temper, but she was certain Agatha could not have noticed it, and when in the course of the day she repeated what had passed, and asked her sister if she did not think that the world had spoken truly, Agatha differed entirely, — the gens-d'armes, the custom-house officers, the waiter, might be in fault, but not Colonel Clive.

Certainly she had no reason to think him so. The whole of that day was devoted to her gratification. A look, a wish, the slightest expression of inclination, was seized upon and immediately carried into execution. Margaret saw it all, at least with her bodily eye; but even then she was mentally blind.

In England she had been simple-minded and abstracted; in France her attention was otherwise engaged. Whatever was proposed, whatever was done, she was equally satisfied. It signified little that she merely received common civilities; she had no thought to bestow upon them. It was scarcely wearisome to be so much with Mrs. St. Aubyn; she wanted no conversation; her feelings were those of intense pleasure; every street, and house, and church,—every person who went by, whether man, woman, or child, was a source of amusement. From the glittering plumage of the foreign birds exposed for sale in the shops upon the quay, to the dingy offices of the Bureau de Police, and the picturesque village of Ingouville, with its comfortable châteaux and pretty gardens, all were charming. She could scarcely tell which afforded her the greatest gratification, the Rue de Paris full of bustle and activity, or the beauty of the extensive view from the hill, commanding the town and harbour, the mouth of the Seine, and the headland of Cap La Heve. Even the walk in the evening on the pier by the baths of Frascati was full of enjoyment. The people assembled were of no very distinguished rank; but the French middle classes are as courteous, and almost as elegant in manner as their superiors; the very tone of their voices was a novelty, and as Margaret watched the English steamer crowded with passengers pass out of the harbour, and thought of the weary night of discomfort, and the home cares to which they might be returning in contrast with the pleasures which awaited herself, her heart bounded with delight. Mrs. St. Aubyn's good nature was quite satisfied by her enthusiasm, and her manner grew more and more cordial. Besides, Agatha had now but little attention to give her, and Margaret's

vivacity was amusing, and took away any sensation of loneliness. She kissed her, for the first time, when they separated at night, and, with a meaning smile, whispered, "that it was fortunate they had decided upon a party of four; three would have been, decidedly, one too many."

CHAPTER X.

Mrs. St. Aubyn's last words were the first which had made any real impression upon Margaret with regard to Colonel Clive's attachment to her sister. They gave a reality to what had before appeared a mere fancy of the moment. She pitied him, grieved for the disappointment which, she believed, was in store for him, and almost wished that the journey had not been proposed. It would, she knew, be impossible to put a stop to any increase of intimacy now; whereas, at home, it might have been easy. She thought of speaking to Agatha; but there was something repugnant to her taste, in suggesting the idea, if her sister was not prepared for it: perhaps, it might be fancy after all; and unable to decide what would be the right step, and, therefore, fearful of taking any, she satisfied herself, after some scruple and deliberation, by deciding that the affair was beyond her reach; and that at Colonel Clive's age, and with his selfish disposition (for selfish she was certain it was, notwithstanding his one instance of liberality), the pain he might receive by the discovery of Agatha's indifference was not likely to be very lasting. There was rather less of light-heartedness in her feelings when she awoke the next morning: the ghost of care seemed to have followed her even to a foreign country; but it was not one which would bear the vivacity and activity of a French town, or the arrangements for the day's journey; and by the time the carriage, which had

been taken for the week, was at the door, Margaret was as much diverted as ever, and as little mindful of Colonel Clive or any thing he might be thinking or saying. This evening they were to be in Rouen, the place which, from childhood, had aroused her imagination more than any other, — more, even, than Paris, or Naples, or even Rome, for it was associated with some highly wrought, fantastic tales, which, at stray moments, when released from lessons, she had read and re-read till they were known by heart, and the descriptions pictured before her mind's eye.

If the termination of the journey was delightful, the road which led to it was scarcely less so. Variety, if not beauty, met her at every turn. There were square, formal châteaux, with iron entrance gates, and long avenues, and little groves of trees, standing like green spots in the desert in the middle of uninclosed fields; low, ivy-covered cottages, picturesque to the beholder, however uncomfortable to the inhabitants; steep banks, and wooded hills; and many a peep of the lovely river, sometimes flowing placidly by them, and then tracing its winding course far away in the distance. Each town and village had something to render it remarkable. Harfleur, with the graceful tapering spire of its beautiful church; — Lillebonne, carrying the fancy back to the time when the shows of the Romans were exhibited in the amphitheatre, still seen distinctly on the side of the hill; and, again, recalling the days when in the old feudal castle, now in ruins, the proud Duke of Normandy assembled his barons to unfold to them the project of the conquest of England; — Caudebec standing on the very margin of the transparent Seine, and enlivened by groups of Normandy peasants holding a fair under the elms which skirted the river; — Duclair, built

under a range of low cliffs, with apartments cut out of the rock; and at length, a scene, which induced even Mrs. St. Aubyn to stand up in the carriage, that she might see it to advantage — the first view of Rouen from the hill of Canteleu. There lay the city spread out beneath them; its churches, streets, manufactories, public buildings, "dimmed by the touch of centuries," crowding the banks of the Seine, whose blue waters wound through the rich valley, and were lost amid the projecting hills which terminated the horizon. Proudly, in the centre, rose the grey front of the cathedral, and, beyond, inferior in rank, but surpassing in beauty, the gorgeous church of St. Ouen: whilst, around them, were grouped the towers and spires of the smaller churches, throwing a tranquil, religious aspect over a place, which from its well-known commerce and manufactories, and the sight of the barges, trading vessels, and steam-boats, passing upon the river, might otherwise have suggested ideas of this world only.

Margaret's ecstasy was a silent one: she disliked expressing pleasure which would be shared in word and not in spirit. Agatha, however, said all that was required; her spirits were gayer than usual, and if her feeling was less deep than her sister's, it was at least fully equal to Colonel Clive's expectations, and his selfishness was for the time quite overcome. He was happy, delighted; no journey had ever afforded him half the enjoyment; and as they descended the hill, he became animated and agreeable, and even exerted himself to point out whatever was most striking. The carriage drove through the Boulevards into the narrow streets, and on a near approach Margaret was a little disappointed. The interesting parts of the city were more in the centre, and the broad quay, though very handsome, was too regular

to suit her ideas of Rouen. She was, however, in no humour to criticise, and but little time was allowed her for further observation. They were to dine at the table-d'hôte, not for pleasure, but to gain some notion of the ordinary style of living in France. The proposal was Colonel Clive's, and it was acceded to, notwithstanding Mrs. St. Aubyn's ejaculation of dismay, and assurances that in the provinces a table-d'hôte was detestable. In Paris she had now and then found it endurable ; but even that was only under certain circumstances, when her own party had been large, and they were pressed for time. Colonel Clive appeared to listen, but he had made up his mind. Agatha had named a wish to him in private upon this subject, and if she had not, he was seldom known to yield a trifling point.

"You are sure you like it; you are not tired?" he said, as he handed Agatha from the carriage, at the entrance of the Hotel de Rouen.

"Say no, for pity's sake, say no, my dear Agatha," whispered Mrs. St. Aubyn. Agatha smiled on her sweetly, but she was beginning to feel her power, and to have pleasure in exercising it.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn must know best, Agatha," observed Margaret : "it can't signify to us."

Agatha smiled again, but not so good humouredly as before.

"Of course, whatever Mrs. St. Aubyn likes; but I should infinitely prefer the table-d'hôte."

Colonel Clive walked into the hotel, calling loudly for the garçon.

"Quelle heure? quelle heure? table-d'hôte," he exclaimed, forgetting his French in his impatience, and looking fiercely at the waiter.

"Ah oui, oui, monsieur, cinq heures precisement;" and the man retired in the utmost haste from the Colonel's menacing aspect.

Agatha laughed, but Mrs. St. Aubyn's face was for the first time since they had left home clouded. A table d'hôte in the month of July, and at five o'clock in the afternoon, — who could bear it? And to be doomed to such a penance for Agatha's whim! a young girl, actually patronised and brought forward by herself: it was almost an insult. She walked proudly up the stairs, the first of the party. Margaret glanced reproachfully at her sister; but there was a gentle impassiveness about Agatha, which no glance could ever reach. The suite of apartments was soon decided on, for there was little choice. The hotel was very full, and but one bedroom could be appropriated to Agatha and Margaret. The salon, however, made up for every deficiency: it was spacious and comfortable, fronting the quay, with a balcony at the window, which extended the whole length of the hotel. Margaret satisfied herself that sufficient amusement would be found even for a wet day in watching what was passing on the river, and then retired to prepare as quickly as possible for the table-d'hôte; a work of no great difficulty, Mrs. St. Aubyn's last injunction, addressed especially to her, being to take care that she was not remarkable, but on no account to give herself any trouble, for it was not at all worth while.

"How excessively foolish in you, Agatha!" began Margaret when they found themselves alone; "for the sake of a table-d'hôte to offend Mrs. St. Aubyn; and after all her kindness, too! I really wish you would let me go and tell her that we have changed our minds."

"If you do," replied Agatha, carelessly, "you will not be quite correct. My mind is not given to change."

"But not when you are wrong? do think of it again."

"There is no right or wrong in the case, that I can see. Colonel Clive wishes me to please myself, and why should I not?"

"Colonel Clive! really Agatha you provoke me. You always put him first."

"Very likely, he is the most important person."

"No, indeed; Mrs. St. Aubyn as a lady has the first right to be consulted. Besides, Colonel Clive only insists upon it because you do."

"That I know quite well: will you dress me? I suppose we may ring for hours before Simpson will be at leisure to help us."

Margaret said no more; and almost before they were ready the bell rang to summon them down stairs. It is rather a nervous thing for an English lady to dine for the first time at a foreign table-d'hôte; for often an unfounded, but natural idea prevails in her mind, that the customs must be wholly different from those with which she is acquainted, and that every one present must understand them except herself. There is a strange uncongeniality in the size of the room, and the length of the tables, without one familiar leg of mutton, or piece of beef, to greet the wandering eye; a dread of ridicule from the quick glances of the black-haired, black-whiskered waiters, and above all, an instinctive shrinking from the cold scrutiny of the more fortunate English travellers, who, having been perhaps for two days domesticated at the hotel, think themselves perfectly at home, and privileged to occupy any spare minutes in observing the new arrivals, and deciding who, and what, and from whence they may be. But the nervousness is seldom lasting. The criticisms, if they are made, do not reach the ear, and there are other and more important objects of attention for all: and when the preliminaries of the repast have been gone through, — when the potage

has disappeared, and the succession of entrées begins, there is little time left for any remarks except speculations upon the dishes which are handed round. Margaret, however, had more leisure than any one else. She had no appetite, for the room was oppressively hot, and she was wearied with the journey. Mrs. St. Aubyn still looked annoyed; but she professed herself pleased to be again partaking of a well-cooked French dinner; and Margaret hoped that Agatha might easily obtain forgiveness. She was longing herself for the moment of release, and vexed that she could not more thoroughly enjoy the scene. Her own party were silent, and the observations made by other persons near her were desultory and uninteresting. One only, heard accidentally in a sudden lull, attracted her notice. It was made by a gentleman opposite, to a very pleasing-mannered English lady, who was sitting next him.

"Then the report is authentic; — but she will never live at Henningsley."

The name was unnatural in that company of strangers. Margaret could almost have asked why they presumed to speak of it,—a place which she had almost fancied her own. She listened for the reply, but it was lost. The gentleman began again —

"To-day did you say? — but who told you?"

"A letter from herself. I am here to meet her."

"Strange — not credible from any other source." Margaret heard, and something about Italian enthusiasm, and then the name of Lady Anstruther; but Mrs. St. Aubyn rose to leave the table, and she was compelled to follow. She gave one glance at the party, determined if possible to recognise them again, and discover who they were. The few sentences which she had caught showed at once the subject of their conversation; and as Margaret re-

verted to Henningsley, and the difference which its occupation would make in her ordinary life, she experienced some irritation against the innocent cause of her expected privation — the Countess Novera. As they went up stairs, she was endeavouring to recall more exactly what had been said, when the loud cracking of postilions' whips, and the heavy rumbling of wheels, announced an arrival. Mrs. St. Aubyn hastened them into the salon, and Agatha's curiosity led her instantly to the window. An open carriage with four horses (in France a sign, not of the rank and wealth, but of the number of the travellers,) stood before the entrance of the hotel; but only one person was in it; the others had already alighted. Agatha had scarcely time to describe a young looking girl, curiously dressed, very un-English, when she also vanished. A bustle in the hotel followed, much greater than usual; — the rushing to and fro of waiters; — the slamming of doors; — more like the excitement of an English inn, than the quietness of a French one, where there are so many separate suites of apartments. It was a distant sound at first, but presently it came nearer. The salon next their own was apparently to be appropriated to the strangers. Agatha was sure they were not French; she had heard one of them speak as they passed. Margaret remembered the words "to-day" which she had heard at the table-d'hôte; it might be the Countess and her party. Her curiosity was roused, and she applied to Agatha for a further description of the person she had seen. Agatha laughed at her sudden interest, and was still more amused when it was explained. Colonel Clive looked from the window to examine the carriage, and pronounced it to be old and badly built: as for the horses, they, as every one knew, went for nothing in France: a

tinker, if he travelled post, with his wife and children, would be compelled to have the same. He knew nothing of the Countess Novera; nothing of the English people at the table d'hôte; but he was certain no lady of rank would travel in that style.

Margaret was silenced, — how could she be otherwise? — by such a dogmatic assertion; yet her curiosity still remained, and when Mrs. St. Aubyn proposed that they should go into the town, just to gain some notion of what it was like before it grew dark, she lingered behind, in the hope of hearing some sound from the adjoining room. But all was still. A waiter stood at the door as they were leaving the hotel, and Margaret would have inquired of him whether the Countess Novera had arrived, if she had not been too shy, besides fearing to attract the observation of some foreign servants who were lounging near, and who might belong to the Countess's suite. She went on, following Colonel Clive and her sister, and not even expressing to Mrs. St. Aubyn the wish which was in her mind; and in the pleasure of the first inspection of Rouen, soon forgot every thing else. They walked along the quay, striking from its broad road and lofty houses, some standing back and having a row of trees in front, and all looking grey and quaint, and totally unlike an English commercial town; and, leaving the river and the beautiful suspension bridge, they turned into the narrow streets, and were soon in the centre of the city. Margaret asked where they were going. Colonel Clive scarcely knew. There was the Palais de Justice, the Hôtel Bourgtheroude, the Place de la Pucelle, the Tour de la Grosse Horloge; perhaps the last was the best hint: it was too late really to see any thing; they would just walk through the streets, and leave lionising for the next day. Margaret mentioned

the cathedral, but no one seconded the wish to see it.

Street after street was passed; all dirty, all narrow, all picturesque, beyond Margaret's most vivid imagination. Overhanging gables, in some parts nearly meeting at the top, carved cornices and ornamented doorways; — the archway of the Tour de la Grosse Horloge, forming a frame as it were for a picture which she longed to sketch: and then the people — women of the lower ranks walking about with neat white caps instead of bonnets; men with scull caps, red or brown, as the taste might be; boys with blue smock frocks, girls with no covering for the head except that bestowed by nature; occasionally, a man with long ear-rings — once, a woman wearing a man's night-cap; and at length, — a sight which Margaret had long coveted, — a real Normandy cap, not merely the pointed sugar-loaf, which was worn by many, but an elevation — a tower of stiff perpendicular muslin, adorned with ribbons, and having two depending flaps or wings, and forming the crowning ornament of the dress of a stout and stately dame, who in a black silk gown enlivened by two gold chains, walked as quickly as her dignity would allow along the crowded streets. Margaret's delight would have been rapturous if she had had any one to share it. Havre, much as she had enjoyed it, was a mere nothing when compared with the charm of Rouen. Her wish also of seeing the cathedral was in a measure gratified; for upon reaching the extremity of the Rue Grand Port, they stood directly in front of it. Colonel Clive remarked that it was a fine church, they would examine it to-morrow; and on he went; Margaret entreated Mrs. St. Aubyn to stay, that she might look at it only for one minute: it was the first cathedral she had ever

seen, — if she might only examine it — only study the carving, the figures, the proportions, — it was so much grander than she had imagined any building could be. Mrs. St. Aubyn smiled, and told her she would have had enough of churches after she had spent two days in Rouen, and hastened her forwards. Margaret could not think so. The splendid building seemed to hallow every object around it. Her uncle had spoken lightly of it, or at least he had not considered it the first object of attention, and yet it seemed then as if nothing could surpass it.

As the thought crossed her, she saw Colonel Clive and Agatha once more stop. It was before another church, a cathedral also in size, less rich in carving and decorations, and bearing some traces of incompleteness, — as is the case with many of the most beautiful Continental churches, — yet exquisite in its proportions ; and in purity of style, and delicacy of taste (especially displayed in the open arches, and tracery of the central tower), far superior, even in Margaret's unpractised eye, to the florid elaborateness of the cathedral. "St. Ouen," said Mrs. St. Aubyn : but Margaret did not require to be told, she knew at once what it must be ; and before a wish to see the interior could be expressed, Colonel Clive and Agatha entered.

Mrs. St. Aubyn seemed surprised, but made no objection to follow them. The door was pushed aside ; and with a greater degree of reverence than of curiosity, Margaret advanced into the church. The shadows of evening were fast gathering around, and the extremities of the long aisles and transepts were shrouded in obscurity ; but before her, the graceful pillars of the nave, their moulded piers unbroken by capitals, rose up into the vaulted roof; whilst beyond them

were mingled arches and columns, altars and chapels, some dark and scarcely to be distinguished, others touched by the light of the dying day, as its mellowed rays shone mistily through the deep yet gorgeous colours of the windows. A few figures were scattered about the building, but none were moving. Kneeling before the shrine of the Virgin or the image of a favourite saint, they were apparently absorbed in devotion; and, except the distant murmur of the world's cares, which reached even to that temple of God, no sound fell upon the ear, save from the farthest end of the south transept, where, before an illuminated altar which shed a flickering light upon the bases of the pillars near, a priest was chanting a mass for the repose of the dead. Margaret stood motionless: she thought of nothing—observed nothing—her whole soul was absorbed in a feeling of intense awe.

Mrs. St. Aubyn approached, and motioned her to go forward; but Margaret objected, for she could not bear to intrude farther into the presence of those whom she believed to be engaged in worshipping their Maker. If it were not so, if idolatry had entered that holy temple, if the corruptions of man's invention had defiled the dwelling-place of the Most High, to Margaret's eye it was not then visible. She saw others in the attitude of prayer, and she felt herself cold and even irreverent in comparison. She could not make them objects of amusement; and, whispering to her companion to leave her, she remained leaning against one of the pillars of the nave, until the circuit of the church had been rapidly made; and then, regardless of Agatha's look of surprise at her want of curiosity, silently took Mrs. St. Aubyn's arm, and the party emerged again into the open air. What a contrast presented itself! The evening had darkened, and

the lamps in the streets, and the shops were lighted. The signs of business had disappeared; and in their stead, the search after amusement seemed the occupation to which all had given themselves. Yet it was not a search — amusement was at hand for all: hardly a voice was heard except in tones of merriment, and few faces were seen unlighted by a smile. Of the rich there appeared scarcely any; but amongst the inferior orders, the petty tradespeople, the porters, the peasants, the servants, the ragged children even, who thronged the narrow streets, one spirit alone prevailed. The Rue Grand Port was a scene of enchantment; the lower portion of the grotesque irregular street was resplendent as if purposely illuminated,—the chemists, grocers, picture-dealers, toymen, had all displayed their wares to the fullest advantage; but the windows of the pastry-cooks, filled with fantastic ornaments and glittering with bonbons, surpassed all others. The light which in a wider street would have been lost, was here concentrated and reflected; and between the opposite rows of illuminations passed the gay groups, who were refreshing themselves after the labours of the day; whilst above, in the dark narrow line of sky left between the projecting roofs, shone the pale pure stars of heaven, like angels looking from afar in sadness and silence upon the vain stir, and transitory pleasures of this lower world. Margaret's eye wandered delighted over the scene, but not with the same careless enjoyment which she might have experienced an hour before. Graver thoughts had sprung up; and though she could gaze upon and admire it, as the "spectacle" of a theatre, she could not enter into it as reality. She could scarcely imagine that others did. St. Ouen in its exquisite beauty, its "soft religious gloom," was still present to her, and

the sparkling gaiety which surrounded her seemed visionary. The distance was short to the hotel, but after walking through one or two of the smaller streets, Agatha complained of being tired, and Colonel Clive insisted upon engaging a "fiacre," and as they drove along the quay, Margaret was glad that he had been peremptory. A crowd had collected before the hotel, very orderly and quiet, and brought together only by two military bands, which were playing in the open air in honour of a grand dinner given by a general officer. Still it was a crowd, and Margaret had a great dislike to one, and a nervous dread of "being" crushed. The people separated easily as the fiacre drove up to the door, and in a few minutes afterwards Margaret was seated in the balcony, gazing upon the river, in which both the stars and the lights from the opposite quay were clearly mirrored, refreshing herself with coffee, and listening to the full tones of the wind instruments, which gave a depth of expression to the favourite Italian airs that followed each other in rapid succession. The calmness of the night, and the beauty of the music, had a charm for others besides Margaret; and the sound of voices in the adjoining salon, the windows of which opened like their own upon the balcony, recalled her former curiosity. The murmur was indistinct, and it was not easy to tell what language was spoken. Margaret moved her chair, with no idea of approaching nearer to the strangers, but in order to be beyond the reach of a conversation between her sister and Colonel Clive, which the music had no effect in stopping. The neighbouring balcony was empty, or she would have remained stationary in her first position; but she had scarcely been seated two minutes, when the band stopped for a few instants, and she fancied she recognised the voice of the lady

who had dined with them at the table-d'hôte, suggesting that it was foolish to remain in the room, they had much better remove into the open air. The answer was given in the voice and accent of a foreigner; gentle and melodious beyond any tones which Margaret had ever heard. The words were English, but not the idiom; and immediately afterwards there was a faint laugh, and in the soft delicious language of Italy the stranger agreed to the proposal, and stepped forward. Margaret moved away, notwithstanding her curiosity she could not turn to look; but her dress caught in the railing, and whilst endeavouring to disentangle it, her eye involuntarily rested upon the countenance of the foreigner. The glance was startling. A stranger she certainly was; an Italian from her dress and manner and voice, yet her features seemed as familiar to Margaret's eye as if they had been present to her from childhood. She knew the oval form of the face, the full forehead, the glossy dark chestnut hair, the deep-set lustrous eye and long nose, and especially the peculiar expression of the small mouth, with its short upper lip, and sweet smile, and yet the trace of something determined and even proud beneath. For an instant Margaret was so confused that she forgot the awkwardness of her position, and gazed intently upon the tall elegant figure standing almost close at her side; but the lady turned suddenly round, and their eyes met; and as the colour rushed to Margaret's cheek, and she hastened to re-enter the salon, she remembered the picture in the dining-room at Henningsley. There was no more doubt; she had seen the Countess Novera. The effect upon her feelings was instantaneous. She almost feared to look again lest the resemblance which had so forcibly struck her should appear less vivid; but the sweet voice and the soft

Italian accent met her ear, and drew her again into the balcony. This time she had but a passing glimpse, for the Countess and her friends left it almost immediately. The bands ceased to play; the crowd dispersed quickly; and Colonel Clive and Agatha, finding their conversation no longer private, withdrew also into the salon.

CHAPTER XI.

Time is certainly not to be measured by days and hours, at least if we consult our own sensations. That day had been one of the longest of Margaret Percival's uneventful life. She had seen, heard, thought, and felt so much, her mind had been in such a perpetual state of transition, she could with difficulty tell what had gratified her most. St. Ouen she would have said, but for the lovely apparition (it seemed scarcely more real) of the Countess Novera. The remembrance of the church in its awful solemnity would never be entirely obliterated, but it would fade away tint after tint, until at length nothing would remain but that strange, incomprehensible memory of a feeling, which is so deep a mystery of our nature. The Countess was to return to the neighbourhood of her own home for a season at least; she was to dwell amidst the same scenes, to enjoy the same beauties, to be in a manner connected with her daily life, yet shut out from and superior to it. There would be something constantly to keep alive the interest which she had already inspired. Even to hear of her and meet her occasionally would add a charm to the common routine of existence; and it was possible that circumstances might bring them to a more intimate knowledge of each other. In the enthusiasm of the moment, having had no experience of disappointment, Margaret flattered herself that in such an acquaintance she should find all that she could desire to make her life agreeable. The Countess was

immediately invested with every virtue and every talent, and Margaret lay down to sleep with a face of beauty and a voice of melody haunting her dreams, and mingling strangely and confusedly with the shadowy outlines, and the solemn tones of the church and the service of St. Ouen. Agatha slept, also; but her last waking thoughts were in little accordance with her sister's. Of the Countess Novera she knew and thought nothing; Margaret had not chosen to communicate her discovery, fearing the observations which might be made. Of St. Ouen she thought still less: it was a splendid church, but the darkness had prevented her from seeing much of it; it was curious to observe the people kneeling about, but she supposed they were only repeating a set of words, so there was no fear of disturbing them; and the tones of the Gregorian chant might be beautiful to those who liked the style of thing, but to her ear they were extremely monotonous. More engrossing subjects now demanded her attention — the luxurious comfort of Ashington Court, and the superiority of position and increase of wealth which she would derive from consenting to be the wife of Colonel Clive. The question had not been actually put, but she could not doubt that it was coming. The colonel's manner during the day, and some observations dropped in the course of the long conversation in the balcony, had convinced her of it. He seemed only waiting to be quite certain of success before he ventured upon his proposal. Agatha knew that a very slight encouragement would bring him to the desired point, yet she hesitated. Cold she was, and selfish and worldly; but she was very young, and coldness does not imply absolute insensibility. At a distance she had thought it might be very desirable to marry a person possessed of so many advantages; but as the pro-

spect drew nearer, other ideas forced themselves upon her mind. She had never dreamt of loving Colonel Clive; that she knew was impossible: but there was a lurking feeling totally the opposite to love which now and then made its presence acknowledged. When Margaret complained of his temper, or the world laughed at his stupidity, Agatha was silent; not because she did not agree, but because she agreed too well. With the consciousness of what might in all probability be her future destiny (for it was many weeks since she had first become certain of her power), she did not choose to acknowledge how fully she was alive to the deficiencies of the man who might soon become her husband.

She saw them all plainly, painfully. Her perceptions were quick, her taste was naturally good, and refined by education; but she had a strong calculating mind and low principles; and the struggle now was between the desire to raise herself in the world, and the dread of linking herself for life to a man whom she could neither love nor respect. Agatha went to bed almost resolved that the final step should never be taken; she awoke in the morning, doubtful and uneasy, — so uneasy that Margaret remarked it and thought she was ill. The very idea seemed to rouse her sister's self-command; she shook off all appearance of langour, talked fast and gaily; and before the breakfast was ready, Margaret's suspicions were dispelled. The day was to be devoted to sight-seeing, with the exception of the first hour after breakfast, which Colonel Clive was obliged to give to business, and the rest of the party to letter-writing. Margaret had promised that her uncle should hear from her, and fancied she should have no difficulty in telling him all that she had seen and felt; but she was not in the humour for description; and besides, descriptions

were always tiresome; and the idea which was then uppermost in her mind, was one in which he would have no sympathy. He would smile if she spoke to him of a foreigner, a perfect stranger, instead of the beauties of Rouen. Yet her thoughts were frequently reverting to this latter subject, and having learnt accidentally from the waiter that the party in the next salon were to set off for Havre early in the afternoon, her chief wish was to gain one more glimpse of the countess before her departure. But there seemed a fatality against her. Colonel Clive's business was despatched sooner than he expected, and they were hurried out, and were not likely to return till late. Margaret gave up the hope, and tried to think that it did not signify, as they should probably soon meet often. Agatha's manner also soon engrossed her attention. It was so unlike her usual equanimity. She took the colonel's arm as usual; but Margaret could see that she was occasionally quite silent; then, as if actuated by a sudden whim, talked and laughed, and again as suddenly became silent. Colonel Clive's perception was not very quick, or he might have been as much struck by the change as Margaret; but he felt himself nearly secure of his object, and whilst Agatha was walking with him, he cared little whether she conversed or not. Perhaps on the whole he preferred silence, for conversation was not his forte, and now and then Agatha was too clever for him.

Rouen in the sunshine appeared as striking as Rouen by lamplight, though in a different way. Colonel Clive was methodical, and had arranged beforehand the plan for the day's sights; and Margaret, overcoming both her wish of seeing the Countess, and her anxiety for Agatha, gave herself up to the pleasures before her. The Palais de Justice, and the Hôtel Bourgtheroude, were duly

lionised; and afterwards, as the churches are generally closed at twelve o'clock, a second visit to St. Ouen was proposed.

It was perhaps less imposing, less awful, when first viewed by the light of day; there was something lost of mystery and what even might be termed romance; but the sense of its perfect beauty increased every moment. From whatever point it was viewed, the purity and completeness of the whole building gave a feeling of rest to the mind. Margaret lingered behind her companions, watching the various effects caused by the glancing of the light through the arches, and the graceful pillars, marking the rich outline of the rose windows, and gazing with wonder as upon a fairy scene into the "benitier" at the lower end of the nave, in which columns and carving and tracery floated in soft reflection; the work it seemed rather of the spirits of the element in which each delicate line was pictured, than the mirror of the structure of human hands. A few persons were engaged in prayer as on the preceding evening: and Margaret's fear of disturbing them recurred to her again; but they seemed unconscious of the presence of the strangers, who were noiselessly walking through the aisles; and after a little hesitation Margaret, withdrawing from Mrs. St. Aubyn that she might not be obliged to talk, followed the common example. Yet it was a painful one. Even to those who have realised but little of the existence and the blessedness of the visible Church of Christ, it cannot be a matter of indifference to enter a Christian temple, and feel that it cannot be for them a place of public common Christian worship. The question naturally arises, where is the error, the grievous sin, which has thus broken the unity of the Church? As yet the thought had never presented itself to Margaret's mind; but when she wandered through that glorious

building, her feelings subdued and exalted, and the longings after truth and holiness, which had slumbered amidst the excitement of the last few days, once more called forth, it forced itself clearly upon her.

She had been told of the errors of the Romish system, but they were not then uppermost in her consideration. Involuntarily the parish church of Deering, its white-washed walls, circular windows, misshapen pews and galleries, and neglected altar rose to view. It was placed by the side of St. Ouen. To Margaret, one was the representative of the Romish, the other of the English Church. She renewed the examination of the beauty before her with something of envy and discontent. The feeling seemed right, and it was indulged; and with it came other thoughts, pure and unearthly. At a little distance knelt a female figure — a lady, simply dressed and apparently young, but her face could not be seen, for her head was buried in her hands. Margaret had noticed her when first they entered; she had watched her since; but there was no movement, no change of position, nothing to mark the slightest distraction of attention. Even Colonel Clive had walked aside when he passed her, struck by a sudden sense of intrusion. Margaret remembered her own careless prayers, often shortened from weariness, often hurried over as a task, and was conscience-stricken and humbled. Her faith, she had been told, was purer; her Church more simple and primitive; but where was the abstraction from earth, the intense devotedness which were expressed in the attitude of the stranger? If alone at that moment she could have prayed earnestly, —it would have been a relief, a luxury; but she was with those who had no thought of prayer, and Margaret could not, in an instant and without an effort, col-

lect her ideas, and fix them upon serious subjects. The desire which she then felt was for solitude — solitude, at least, in that place: to be one amongst the small number who were not admiring but worshipping. Margaret was standing apart when Agatha came up to hasten her away. She was wishing, she said, to take a sketch in the garden adjoining the church, and if they remained longer there would be no time.

"A sketch!" repeated Margaret, "why should you do that?"

"Oh, Margaret, how absurd; you wished it yourself, just now."

"Did I?—I think I remember; but I don't care about it. Can't you let me stay here till you have finished?"

Agatha doubted; she did not imagine that Mrs. St. Aubyn would approve. But Mrs. St. Aubyn had no very strict idea of the duties of a chaperone, and in a church there could be no possible objection.

"Margaret was extremely unsociable," she said; "yet if she liked to stay, no one could say nay;"— and Margaret thanked her warmly, and having watched them through the west door, returned again to her reveries. The figure which she had first noticed still retained the same position; and it was different from almost every other. There were some persons kneeling before pictures, some before different altars, and with them Margaret had comparatively little sympathy. They reminded her of what she had been told of the practical, though it might not be the theoretical, idolatry of Romanism; and she could not but feel that visible objects must at all events require a painful effort of the mind in striving to pass beyond them.

But the devotion which had attracted her had nothing of this earthly admixture. It was, to all

outward appearance, as pure as it was undisturbed; and why could not she pray also? Why could not she kneel in a Christian church, and ask that God would pardon her many sins, and guide her in her future path? None could have more need of prayer, for none could be weaker or more ignorant. But a few days had gone by since she had, as she believed, entered upon a new course of life; and a prospect of enjoyment, a change of scene, had entirely deadened her impressions. Only the previous night she had suffered a dream of the fancy to engross her attention, and had lain down to rest, not without prayer, but with such prayer, so cold and wandering, as it was only humiliation to remember; so it might be again. It was a superstitious notion which arose at the moment,—a half belief that the resolutions made in that place would be more lasting than any others. Yielding to the impulse, Margaret cast a hasty glance around to see that she was not observed, and placing her chair in a situation where she was screened by one of the columns of the transept, knelt for the first time amongst strangers in a strange land; amongst Christians, with whom she was forbidden communion. Her prayer was short, offered hurriedly, and with a nervous dread of being noticed; but it was humble and fervent; a supplication for pardon which rose from the very depth of the heart; an act of self-dedication in which there was no shrinking from the prospect of any sacrifice. Margaret rose more tranquil and happy. The sense of loneliness was lessened. A Christian herself, she felt that those around her were Christians also. They had the same wants, the same hopes; differences there might be in externals, but the foundation, she believed, was in all alike.

We live in an age when the unity of the Church

of Christ is considered unattainable, and is by many scarcely acknowledged to be a blessing. We have even ceased to lament over its absence; and the greatness of our loss is seldom understood or appreciated till we find ourselves in a foreign country, shut out in spirit from the temples which ought to be open to us as our homes; — upon some it will then press most painfully; the purer, the more earnest, the more sensible of their privileges in their own land, the greater will be their regret and their temptation. Margaret's mind was not as yet one of these: religion with her was only in its germ, but a naturally imaginative and ardent disposition will instinctively cling to the beautiful vision of past ages, when the members of the Christian Church were supposed to form one family on earth, as they hope to be one in heaven; when altars and homes were open to them on every shore; when to the eye of sense, as now to the eye of faith, there was but "one body, and one spirit," and "one hope of their calling;" "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all." Whether it were a dream or a reality, few have paused to ask. Whether it were truth in the early ages of Christianity, or when the thirst for temporal dominion had usurped the first place in that kingdom of our Lord which is "not of this world," still fewer will now inquire. It is enough that the longing for visible communion has been excited in their breasts, and that a theory of unity, tangible and comprehensible, is presented to them. Fancy is gratified and feeling roused; and reason — set aside because it has been perverted to earthly uses — is considered no longer as a gift for which we shall be responsible to our Maker, but as a treacherous instrument, which it is unsafe for minds so weak to employ. Till that

hour Margaret Percival had never felt that the doctrines and practices of the Romish church could in any way be suited to her needs; and she did not then examine or dwell upon them in detail, but stationing herself where she could best enjoy the beauty of the building, she gave herself up to the holy soothing influences about her, unthinking that aught of danger could be associated with things so pure. They were moments of exquisite enjoyment which were thus spent; moments which might almost have tempted her to believe that the world could never again entangle her in its snares. She was conscious of her sincerity, and earnest in her devotedness; and the prayer which had joined her, at least outwardly, in the fellowship of a sister church, had enlarged and hallowed her feelings of sympathy. There was peace in her heart; and, when she again looked for the kneeling figure, it was with humility, yet with less self-reproach. But the object of her interest was no longer to be seen; for during the short time that Margaret's thoughts had been otherwise occupied, she had retired. Margaret was disappointed. She walked once more through the building, expecting the return of her party, but as she saw Colonel Clive re-enter alone, and went towards him, she caught sight of a dress which she recognised, — it was the stranger; yet Margaret would scarcely have imagined her tall graceful form to be the same which she had seen bent in such deep humiliation. She was standing before a picture over one of the side altars, and her face was averted; but when Margaret drew near she seemed disturbed by the sound of her footstep, and glancing quickly round their eyes met, and Margaret once more beheld the beautiful features of the Countess Novera. Both paused, but only for an instant. Margaret longed to look again, but the

Countess moved aside, and Margaret, passing on, could not perceive the expression of interest mixed with surprise which followed her. The Colonel hastened her from the church, and the Countess watched her till she was gone; and then, summoning an attendant who was in waiting, stepped into her carriage and drove back to the hotel.

CHAPTER XII.

"ONLY two more days in Rouen," said Margaret to her sister, when she returned to her room the same evening. "Are you very sorry?"

"I don't know. I was not thinking about it."

"But think now. Have you any great wish to go farther?"

"Have you?" was the only answer.

Margaret laughed.—"I know why you won't acknowledge the truth," she said; "you don't choose to own that you are tired of your constant companion."

"Who? what?" and Agatha turned round sharply.

"Nay, there can be no need of explanation; if we could have exchanged partners occasionally, you would not be quite so moody, that is all I mean."

"And I am as wise as I was before," replied Agatha.

"No offence, I hope," said Margaret, archly. "I did not know it was a point which so nearly concerned you."

Agatha cast upon the table the chain and eyeglass which she held in her hand, and threw herself into an arm chair.

"Something is the matter," said Margaret, rather frightened; "are you ill?"

"Me! no, absurd. What makes you think so?"

"You are ill—I am sure: you look so."

Agatha smiled; but there was something unna-

tural in the expression, and Margaret repeated the observation.

"I am not ill, Margaret, indeed; but I am tired."

"Only tired?— are you sure?"

"Only tired," was the reply; and Margaret pursued her occupations without attempting any further remarks. Agatha leant back her head, and shut her eyes, and her sister thought she was going to sleep: but after a little while Agatha seemed awake again.

"You will be much better in bed," said Margaret; "let me help you."

Agatha rose up quickly:—"Thank you, I am not quite invalid enough for that: I have a headache,—nothing more."

"All Colonel Clive's doing, I am certain," said Margaret: "which does not mean, though, that I am not grateful to him."

"Only that you would not marry him," said Agatha, in a voice of forced calmness.

"Marry him!—no, not for ten thousand worlds."

"And I would," said Agatha, not a muscle of her countenance moving. The tone was quite serious, and Margaret started, and gazed on her sister without speaking.

"And will," continued Agatha, still not showing any change of manner.—"What makes you look so strangely?" she added, as Margaret turned pale.

"Strange! do I look strange? no wonder: but, Agatha, you are so foolish; you frightened me."

"If I did, it was with truth; but there is nothing very alarming in being engaged to be married."

"No! I don't know; I am sure I should think it so. But I should be thankful if you would leave off this habit of teasing."

"Margaret," said Agatha gravely, "this is no time for mystery: when you think of me from

henceforth, it must be as the affianced wife of Colonel Clive."

Agatha fancied she had spoken cheerfully, but she did not know how quickly the ear of affection can interpret a slight intonation of the voice; and Margaret's ear was that of affection. There was little congeniality between Agatha and herself in disposition, little sympathy in taste, but they were sisters, and the strength of that tie it requires years of separation and discordance to loosen.

"In earnest?"—and Margaret stood before Agatha, and laying her hand upon her arm, looked at her steadfastly: "once more tell me, let me have no doubts."

"I cannot say it more clearly," replied Agatha; "Colonel Clive has asked, and I have consented."

There was a dead silence.

"Without consideration, without thinking of my father and my mother, and all at home?" said Margaret at length.

"There is no occasion," replied Agatha; "you can have no doubt what they will say. But, Margaret, I thought I should have had congratulations."

The word jarred so much upon Margaret's feeling, that her forced composure was at end. She sat down, trying to hide her face.

"What does this mean, dear Margaret?" said Agatha, with greater tenderness of manner than she usually evinced. "How can there be any thing painful in the notion of my marrying Colonel Clive? you must have been prepared for it."

"Prepared! oh, no, no; who could have been? I saw that he admired you, but so does every one." Margaret raised her head, and added in a lower tone,—"Are you sure, Agatha, that you love him?"

The question was a trying one even to Agatha's impenetrability. "I don't know any thing about

love," she said, after a short pause; "such love at least as people talk of: and if it were to come, it might be no good to me; I might not be able to marry."

"But esteem — have you esteem, Agatha? — it must be dreadful to marry without it."

"Of course, there is nothing to object to; nothing to find fault with: and you can't imagine how fond he is of me."

"Fond, before marriage!" exclaimed Margaret; but she repented when she saw that Agatha was offended. She rose immediately, and throwing her arm round her sister's waist, and kissing her affectionately, she said, — "I will never talk so again, dearest, if your happiness is concerned; only let me speak to you to-night for the last time."

Agatha did not refuse to listen, and Margaret continued in a hurried voice; "It cannot be love, — you have owned that it is not: and what is married life without it?"

Agatha smiled coldly, and answered, — "I am not romantic."

"Neither am I; you know it well. It is impossible I should ever have cared for any one, and no one has ever cared for me: but I would rather endure the utmost extremity of bodily suffering, than I would risk the happiness of my life by consenting to marry a man for whom I felt, as I am certain you feel, for Colonel Clive."

Agatha turned proudly away from her. "You forget, Margaret," she said, "he is to me now as my husband."

"I am wrong, forgive me," exclaimed Margaret; "and yet I am not wrong; he is not your husband now, and God grant he never may be!"

"He is my husband, in my eyes," said Agatha; "as such he must be spoken of. I have con-

sulted for my own happiness, and my resolution is fixed."

"Fixed! fixed!" repeated Margaret; as if trying to gain the full meaning of the words.

"My father will approve, and my mother will rejoice," continued Agatha.

"And my uncle!" rose to Margaret's lips, but she checked herself in time.

"You will think differently soon," pursued Agatha; "this is only the surprise of hearing what you were not prepared for. For my sake you will love him, when he is your brother."

Margaret's whole soul revolted from the name; but she could not bring herself to utter her secret thought. It was strange that during the conversation not one allusion had been made to the attraction which each knew was, in this case, to be the foundation of married happiness—money. Margaret would scarcely acknowledge to herself that her sister could be heartless and mercenary, and Agatha knew Margaret too well to hold out as consolation the tempting bait from which she was aware both her principle and taste would recoil.

For Margaret's mind was essentially unworldly; more since she had grown into womanhood than even in her childish years. There is a purity and delicacy of feeling instinctive in a woman's mind, bestowed, it might seem, as a special gift to compensate for all that must be deemed inferiority in her position. It was a gift which Margaret had early prized, and most carefully cherished; not by dwelling upon, and exaggerating it into a morbid fastidiousness, but by shunning every thing that could taint it. Agatha read books by stealth, which her mother did not approve; Margaret not only refused to follow her example as a child, from a hatred of deception, but when left to the choice of her

own studies, closed instantly any volume, however interesting, with which she would have blushed to have been seen. Agatha talked lightly, and listened to tales of scandal, and fostered her natural vanity by drinking in the honied flatteries which were poured into her ear, unmindful from whom they came; but Margaret would hear nothing, would join in nothing which could not have borne the scrutiny of the whole world. The tree of knowledge — such knowledge as was too frequently offered her — would she felt, be to her the tree of evil only; and blest in her ignorance and innocence, she gave no heed to ridicule, and was contented to hear herself accounted absurdly particular, even by those whose admiration was deemed an honour, if only she might retain her own self-respect. It was the instinct of a pure and simple mind which was her first safeguard; and when religious motives began to actuate her, this was one amongst many causes of continual thankfulness. To know the evil that exists around us, is sometimes said to be necessary in order to the formation of a sound judgment; but experience will prove the fallacy of the assertion. Familiarity with any object does not sharpen, but deaden our perception of its nature. We live with our friends till we become insensible to the beauty or the deformity of their features; we throw the charm of association around our homes, and forget that they are barren and uninteresting; and we read of vice, and hear of worldliness, and selfishness, and paltry ambition, till we lose all notion of their being in themselves sinful and degrading. We say they are so, but to us they have become common, and our condemnation is unaccompanied by feeling. So it was that Margaret had a better judgment than Agatha, because she had a purer mind. She could see

truths to which her sister was blind; and from having learnt to look upon marriage as a most sacred engagement, she had a clear insight into the misery which must be the result when it is entered upon with low views. Yet Margaret saw that it was hopeless to interfere. There were no tangible grounds for objection; it was entirely a question of feeling; and if Agatha had feelings, they were cased in ice, and beyond her reach.

"We will say no more," said Agatha; finding that Margaret's aversion to the idea was greater even than she had expressed.

"If saying were to be of use," replied Margaret,—"if it would only induce you to pause, I would speak till you were weary."

Agatha uttered an exclamation of impatience. "Pause! Margaret, — I have paused; I have been delaying for weeks: yes, a month since I might have brought matters to this point if I had chosen it."

"Then it is deliberate, —wilful," said Margaret sadly.

"Wilful, if you will call it so; but merely the wilfulness of knowing that I can judge best for my own happiness."

"Happiness! to live with him always," said Margaret; "to feel that you ought to look up to him, and yet that you despise him! to watch his petty mind! to see that he is ridiculed!"

Agatha's brow became crimson.—"This is trying me too far, Margaret," she said; "you said that you would speak for the last time; let it be the last. If we are to be sisters for the future, it must be."

Margaret made no reply; the worldliness, the meanness of her sister's conduct, rose at every instant more fully to view; even indifferent, low-

minded people would understand and condemn it: they would say that Agatha had married for money.

Margaret unconsciously gave low-minded people credit for a portion of her own delicacy. She would have been less unhappy then, though neither better nor wiser, if she had shared Agatha's knowledge of matrimonial speculations. But there was one person whose opinion could not be doubted — her uncle. At the thought of him, Margaret was humbled with shame for her sister: she lay down to rest, but forgetfulness was far from her; and when, at length, she fell asleep, it was with a sensation of greater disgust at the marriage than even at the first moment of its announcement.

CHAPTER XIII.

Margaret was the last to appear in the salon at breakfast. She did her utmost to seem unconscious, even when Colonel Clive gave a significant pressure of the hand as she wished him good morning; but the party were oppressively gay. The Colonel had assumed a youthful air, and Mrs. St. Aubyn with difficulty refrained from meaning glances. Margaret had purposely delayed dressing, that there might be no time for conversation with Agatha, and now watched her particularly to discover the state of her mind. The placid lovely countenance betrayed no emotion of any kind, except that the colour on the cheek was perhaps a little more heightened than usual; but in manner there was a slight alteration. Agatha talked a good deal, and quickly, especially in answer to any remark of Colonel Clive's. Her adroitness in converting his common-place speeches into something amusing, would have been delightful to an ordinary hearer. Margaret saw in it only the beginning of an effort, — not at self-deception, the time for that was long past, but at deceiving the world. She listened patiently to all that went on, till in answer to some casual remark, Colonel Clive addressed her as "Margaret." Agatha caught the word and the expression of her sister's countenance. She broke into the middle of the sentence with less tact than usual; but the Colonel was not to be diverted from his purpose. "Margaret," he repeated again, and their eyes met, and he smiled.

Mrs. St. Aubyn said something about brothers and sisters, and a faint blush tinged Agatha's cheek. Margaret's lady-like feelings struggled hard with her anger. She was aware that under the circumstances the Christian name could scarcely be deemed a liberty; but she was not accustomed to consider the future relationship; and the term of familiarity, when used even by persons of her own sex without permission expressly granted, was offensive to her taste. She did, however, subdue the rising irritation, smiled also, and replied gently; and none but Agatha saw that the bitter predominated over the sweet.

It was well that the lesson was begun early, for it required constant practice. Agatha's position naturally made a change in the whole tone of the party. "I" and "you" were superseded by "we." Margaret's satisfaction was taken for granted; and Mrs. St. Aubyn, who had rather given up Agatha since her pertinacity about the table-d'hôte, made her the confidante instead, giving her the history of the means by which she had carried out her wishes with regard to the marriage; wishes which had been formed from the time when Colonel Clive succeeded to the Ashington property. "He requires such a wife, my dear," she said; "he is glad of some one to amuse him; he feels wearied sometimes, for he is not like a professional man; and he is such a great admirer of beauty. And Agatha is sure to be happy; she will have every thing she wants. As to temper, why,— one would wish it to be otherwise; but she will learn how to manage him."

"I hope so," said Margaret, more gravely than she had intended.

"Oh, no fear, my love; he does extremely well when he is not thwarted; and when there is real affection, things always go straight."

Real affection! how deeply Margaret sighed. In such cases real affection is always taken for granted as a matter of courtesy.

The day was long. Even the sight-seeing, the drive to Mont St. Catharine in the morning, and to the little church of St. Gervais in the afternoon, could not prevent Margaret from finding it so. If any thing could have diverted her thoughts, the crypt of St. Gervais, in which the early Christians, fifteen centuries before, offered their solemn worship, would have served the purpose. It did so indeed for a few minutes, whilst the imagination was carried back to past ages, and the change from the first simplicity of a Christian service to the gorgeous ritual of the Romish church was recalled by strength of contrast; but when the church was left, when the narrow steps which led down to the crypt were remounted, and when the old sacristan, whose heart seemed devoted to the treasure committed to his care, had bowed and bade them farewell, Margaret's thoughts turned again from heaven to earth. All her wishes were now centred in home. She would not have gone farther with her present party under any temptation. The Colonel and Mrs. St. Aubyn became more and more uncongenial from the circumstance which was to render them in a degree members of her own family. All defects were seen, and some perhaps magnified. Margaret blamed herself for prejudice and ingratitude; tried to think that Agatha had chosen wisely; endeavoured to believe that married life might be comfortable, even if there was no love to make it actually happy; but it would not do. She was too candid for self-deception, and the utmost charity could not prevent her from fearing that Agatha was acting dishonourably; that she was pretending an affection which she did not feel.

But "time and the hour rub through the roughest day." So Margaret repeated to herself many times, wondering at the comfort which the words gave her; the sort of "assurance doubly sure," which in seasons of weariness or impatience we are occasionally inclined to require. The Sunday morning followed. Margaret's English ideas were shocked at the sight of business and pleasure proceeding as on ordinary occasions, and her incipient liking for the Roman Catholic religion was not increased in consequence. She went to the cathedral with the rest of the party, and hoped she should have understood the service, having read the prayers beforehand, and seen that they were in great part like those of the English church. She imagined even that it might be possible to join in those which did not embody the peculiar doctrines of Romanism; but all was confusing though very beautiful. The music, the incense, the perpetual movements of the priests, and the brilliant colours of the vestments, distracted her attention. She could not realise that she was in a place where people were uniting in prayer, for all appeared engaged in their own. Some persons near her knelt, some sat, some looked about. The celebration of the mass by the priests, in the choir, was one service, and the devotions of the people, in the nave, seemed another. A connection she knew there must be between them, but she was too ignorant to know what it was; and to be observing, and wondering, and turning over the pages of her book, as if merely watching a show, was distressing to her newly-awakened spirit of piety.

She left the cathedral with the wish never again to be present at a service in which she could not join; and retiring afterwards to her own room, read by herself the prayers of the English Church,

which she alone of the party remembered were at that time being offered in their own country. Still more on that day Margaret lamented the absence of unity.

The fourth evening in Rouen was over at last. Colonel Clive's business had been finished on the preceding day, and imperative necessity called him back to England.

"If it had not been business," he said, "which did not admit of delay, nothing would have induced him to allow them to return without seeing Paris; but it need only be a short postponement," he added, looking at Margaret with an intimate, confidential expression. "In a very short time, he hoped, they would both return to the Continent."

Margaret could not bring herself to say either "yes," "no," or "thank you:" but she resolved in her secret heart that nothing should induce her ever to become that most pitiable individual, a companion in a wedding tour.

Silence was now the tacit compact between herself and Agatha, — in packing, at night, in the morning, during the whole of the next day, still it was silence — upon the one subject which interested them. On all others they conversed amicably, and said all that was proper and necessary, but Margaret was not what she had been in spirits and enjoyment. Colonel Clive thought her grave, as he had often done; he could not understand, and did not thoroughly like her, but she was useful in taking care of his sister; and if she had been really disagreeable, he would then have borne with her for Agatha's sake. Mrs. St. Aubyn was rather puzzled; she had made up her mind that every member of the Percival family would be delighted at the marriage — so superior to any thing they could have anticipated — good connections, large

fortune, gentlemanly manners,—what could be wanting? She began to think, at last, that jealousy must be the origin of Margaret's depression, and watched her narrowly in consequence; and having little else to think of, it became rather an amusement. Margaret was wholly unsuspicious of the observation she was attracting, believing that every sign of her inward sentiments had been suppressed. She exerted herself to make remarks, and looked out for the objects which had pleased her when they had before travelled the same road, but insensibly her mind returned to its first state of listlessness. It was not that she was unhappy, but there was an oppressiveness in every thing,—it was impossible to be light-hearted. They reached Havre early in the evening, and found that it would be some time before the packet would be under weigh. A discussion ensued as to what should be done. Agatha was vexed that they had not been better informed, as they might, in that case, have spent a longer time at Rouen. Havre, she thought, was detestable, and it was her idea that they could not do better than go on board at once. Mrs. St. Aubyn differed from her. The journey had wearied her, she said, and she did not feel well, and thought they should all be the better for rest — such rest as could not be had in a steam packet. Margaret's opinion was not asked; but she hoped that Agatha would have had the grace to yield her own inclination. Agatha, however, was not rendered less selfish by knowing that her will was paramount over all. One of the petty temptations which had induced her to consent to marry Colonel Clive had been the love of power. She imagined she could rule him, and she never ruled at home, at least visibly. She was very courteous — extremely sorry that Mrs. St. Aubyn was fatigued; but, since they were come, she

still thought that it would be the best way to go on board at once. They went, for Colonel Clive insisted upon it, notwithstanding Margaret's request and Mrs. St. Aubyn's complaints; and in the course of an hour and a half they were sailing out of the harbour.

The night that followed — what words may describe it? A slight breeze ruffled up into a strong wind; a strong wind became a fierce gale; the gale almost a tempest! "No danger," said the captain; but captains always say so, and inexperienced landsmen find it difficult to believe them. And if it were true, if danger there were not, fright and suffering there certainly were. Noises, unintelligible and fearful; straining of the cordage, creaking of the mast, calls of the sailors, shouts from the look-out, orders from the captain, half stifled screams from ladies, deep groans from gentlemen, — all mingling with and added to the sights, and sounds, and sensations of physical suffering, so great as to prostrate every energy of body and mind. Great injuries are sometimes more easily forgiven than small ones. Mrs. St. Aubyn always declared that Agatha had caused her this night of dire distress; that if she had rested first she should have borne all perfectly well. And when she was carried on shore, pale and helpless, and conveyed to the nearest hotel, her first movement was to motion Agatha from her, and entreat that Margaret would come to her instead. Margaret's commiseration was sincere, for after all Mrs. St. Aubyn's kindness, this seemed a most unfortunate termination to their travels.

Agatha was uncomfortable, but declared that it was no person's fault; the storm could not have been foreseen; and as to Mrs. St. Aubyn's complaints of fatigue and illness before they sailed, she had imagined they were half fanciful. Colonel

Clive had told her that his sister often was fanciful. Selfish people are always ready with plausible excuses; and under the influence of admiration and worldly prosperity, Agatha was becoming every day more intent upon gratifying her own will. A breakfast, which was scarcely touched, and a few hours' rest, succeeded the landing. Margaret was too unwell to make comparisons between English and foreign habits, though they are in general very striking after the return even from so short a visit to the Continent. She took care to order every thing for Mrs. St. Aubyn's comfort, and then hurried to her own room, to sleep if possible, and forget—though the sounds still rang in her ears—that such a complication of miseries could have been endured in one night.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE incidents which followed the return of Margaret Percival to her home must for a while be left undetailed, while we turn our attention to persons and events with which as yet she has been but little connected. In a spacious drawing-room, forming one of a suite of apartments in a first-rate London hotel, a little group of three persons was stationed near a large window, commanding one of the most splendid streets in the metropolis. Two were females, the other was a dark-complexioned foreigner, in the dress of a Romish ecclesiastic. His age appeared to be sixty, or even more. Lines of thought had indented his features, and given them an expression not so much of suffering as of deep study—the indication of a mind which has read not only books but men; and when at times he gave his attention to the conversation which was passing, his quick glance, subdued the instant afterwards into rigid indifference, seemed as if it would scrutinise the inmost secrets of the breast. His demeanour was more, however, that of meditation, than of interest in the affairs of the world; for the objects on which his eyes rested excited no remark, and his closely shut lips, together with an involuntary movement of his fingers, showed that his thoughts were pre-occupied.

"Lucia," said the Countess Novera, addressing in Italian a slight-made, very intelligent-looking girl, but with an air of melancholy in her countenance,

who was sitting near her, "this is not like our beautiful Italy, is it?"

"Ah! Signora," and Lucia shook her head and sighed.

"You repent," continued the Countess, rather sadly;" "but you are still at liberty. I am amongst my friends now."

Lucia bent her dark eyes upon the table, and took up some work which was lying beside her.

"Nay," said the Countess, placing her hand gently upon it, "you must amuse yourself whilst you are here."

"Grazia, Signora;" but Lucia did not look up for several moments: and when she did, it was merely to replace her needle in its case, and then, carrying her embroidery with her, she left the room.

"A marvellous change, is it not, father?" said the Countess, addressing her confessor, who had aroused himself from his musing attitude as the door closed. Father Andrea started, for he had not noticed what had passed.

"I should scarcely have thought of bringing Lucia from her home, but for your advice," continued the Countess; "yet I think now you must see that you were mistaken. Her love for me may be great, but her love for her native country is greater."

"These are early days, my daughter," replied the priest; "wait till she is reconciled to the difference of customs."

"And of climate, and feeling, and religion," exclaimed the Countess; her sweet voice becoming peculiarly emphatic.

"We will leave out the last," replied Father Andrea; "Lucia Fontana is not likely to become reconciled to that."

"Neither am I, father," said the Countess, whilst a blush of offended pride mantled on her cheek.

"Still retaining enmity for that one word of friendly caution?" answered the confessor.

"Not enmity, no, that could never be against you; but it was a harsh distrust; tell me that you think it so."

"Daughter, could it be harsh to fear, lest the daughter of an English nobleman, returning to her English home, should, in time, after being exposed to the fascinations of society, think less tenderly of her adopted country?"

"But my religion is not adopted," replied the Countess; "it is the religion of my forefathers, and the country was my husband's."

The last words sank into a whisper.

Father Andrea drew nearer to the Countess, and looking at her steadfastly, said:—"Yes, it was a distrust, not harsh, but uncalled for. Yet, like other human errors, it may be forgiven."

"That is not a word for your lips, father," replied the Countess, in a tone of meekness; "forgiveness is to be sought by me, for my petulance; but I will tell you,—I have sometimes thought that you would trust more implicitly to Lucia, child though she is, than to me after my many sorrows."

"I would trust her more, simply as I would trust any other erring creature, because she has fewer temptations; but it is, in reality, no question of trust. Heaven forbid that I should ever fear your becoming an apostate from the one true faith. I have only feared lest intercourse with friends you will, perhaps, love too well, should shake your peace of mind; should lead you to regret—"

"My vow! my solemn promise!" exclaimed the

Countess, "given to him — my all — in that awful hour! Father, I am indeed humbled!"

"Regret, — only regret," repeated the confessor, in the same undisturbed tone, which showed little sympathy with the Countess's look of anguish.

Beatrice covered her face with her hands; — then suddenly rising, — with recovered self-possession, yet with a deep earnestness of manner, she said: "Hear me, father: I am ignorant and proud, and self-willed; none can know it better than yourself; and you have distrusted me. Nay, — do not attempt to reason away your words," she added, seeing that he was about to speak; "you were right, for I deserved it: I am a creature of impulse, and, upon some points, I cannot answer for my own convictions for a single day; yet if there is one feeling grafted into my very nature, born with me, cherished, expanded, and now made more sacred by the loss which has rendered life a desert, it is that of devotion to the Church. As I vowed to my husband on his death-bed, so will I now renew that vow to you."

Father Andrea's countenance retained its immovability, till the last words were spoken, when a smile of satisfaction brightened his stern countenance. — "You are right, my daughter," he said; "fear of ourselves is wisdom in the sight of heaven. The binding nature of your promise cannot, indeed, be strengthened, but your own resolution may be. When next I hear your confession I will be a witness to the renewal of your engagement."

"Not then," said the Countess firmly, "but at this instant;" and, bending meekly before him, she crossed her hands upon her breast, and repeated the words by which once before, when kneeling by her husband's death-bed, she had pledged herself never to give, nor alienate, nor lend, nor mortgage, her lands, her money, her jewels, her property or

possession of whatever kind, beyond a certain small specified amount, for the benefit of any individual who should not be in the communion of Rome, or, as she termed it, "a member of the one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church."

Father Andrea drank in each word as it was uttered in the clear undoubting tone of one whose heart was free from every taint of insincerity; and then pronounced his blessing fervently, even tenderly.

The Countess rose, placed her hand within his, and said calmly,—"You are satisfied; and now we will speak of Lucia."

"It is useless to-day," he replied; "you are impatient with her. She must be amused: carry her about wherever you may go; divert her mind, if possible. It is but a home-sick fancy, and it cannot be lasting."

"If I were sure of it," said the Countess musingly; "but the mood comes suddenly, and it was never so before."

"She will be better at Henningsley, my daughter; you must take her there soon."

"Yes, believe me, as soon as it can by any means be made possible. This place oppresses me in mind and body."

"Yet it is very wonderful; I should have thought it might have pleased you, if only from that cause."

"You forget, it has not even the charm of novelty. And the friends you fear,"—the Countess smiled more cheerfully than she had yet done,—"the relations who you believe will have such charms, have already laid their spell upon me, and failed."

"That was years since," replied the father;

"when your heart was in Italy. You have owned that the attractions of England are very different now."

"Yes, it seems more my home, because it was the home of my father and my mother, and that blessed one which I called my own is desolate. But the barrier still exists — the difference of religion."

"You will find sympathy even in that respect in England," said Father Andrea.

"Ah! if I could hope so ——"

Lucia's re-entrance interrupted the conclusion of the sentence.

The Countess continued after a hasty glance: — "I have but little love now left, father, and I am not likely to bestow that little on English heretics."

Lucia, as she heard this, gave her full attention to the conversation; and the Countess addressing her, said:—

"Father Andrea and I have been talking of our movements, Lucia. You will not be sorry to leave this gay world, and go with us to Henningsley."

Lucia's eyes sparkled. "Ah, Signora! felice, felicissima!—but when?"

"Nay, you must not be impatient," said the Countess, smiling; "we must bestow six weeks, perhaps more, upon London."

"And friends," added Lucia; but in so low a tone that it did not reach the Countess's ear.

"I am going out," she said; "and you will come with me, I am sure. Lady Anstruther's carriage will be here directly. Father, I know your engagements are many."

The Countess left the room, but Lucia remained behind. Father Andrea took up a book, yet his

eye wandered frequently from it. Twice he seemed about to make a remark, but each time he stopped, and laying down the volume, allowed his keen eye to rest upon the young girl, who, notwithstanding the Countess's wish, still kept her position.

"My daughter," he said, at length, in a voice of grave condemnation, "you are unjust."

Lucia's eyes flashed at the reproof, but the impulse of anger was in a moment subdued, or at least shown only by the concealed bitterness of tone in which she answered, —"Father, you have told me so before."

"And I repeat it," he continued, still more gravely; "you are unjust, ungrateful; you cherish suspicions where you ought to give your whole trust."

"You did not think so once, father," replied Lucia, gently; though the gentleness was evidently an effort.

"I thought once, and I think still, that England will have greater attractions for the Countess Novera than she is herself disposed to believe; but I never thought, I never said, that those attractions could make her forget her love for you,—the child of her husband's dearest friend."

"She is English," said Lucia, "and I am Italian."

Father Andrea's book was pushed aside with a hasty air as he replied, "These are childish fancies, daughter. I tell you again it is sin to indulge them."

"Then it is sin to love," said Lucia.

"Yes, to love as you would love; to claim all, when you have right only to a part. Think of it, and beware."

He waited for a moment, and finding that Lucia did not answer, added: "We spoke upon this

subject at Rouen. I hoped you had profited by my advice."

"The case is altered," replied Lucia; "I saw then that I was fanciful."

"Yet the same jealousy which made you unjust, because the Countess expressed interest in an English girl, still exists."

"I could understand that, father," said Lucia, "after you explained it to me. It was natural that the Countess should be touched by seeing one whom she supposed a heretic worshipping in a Catholic church; but the friends whom she now has, have no such claims. Even for the sake of our holy religion I have a right to be jealous."

"You will leave the Church to my care, daughter," replied the confessor; "the salvation of your own soul is sufficient for your exertions."

He walked to the door, and once more repeating his warning, left Lucia to her own thoughts. They were not the quiet, happy, hopeful thoughts of an English girl, just entering upon life. The proud spirit of the South was aroused, and as Lucia's fancy wandered back to her native land, she asked herself why she had left it. Why had she not listened to the voice of her own jealous temper, which told her that in England she would be unhappy? The Countess loved her, it was true: she had taken her to live with her since her father's death, and engaged to provide for her when it was found that she was portionless; but the love was not that which Lucia craved. It was pity and fondness, but it was not sympathy. The Countess had been educated with English habits and English care: and Lucia was Italian in every thought and feeling. The Countess was highly gifted and accomplished: Lucia was quick and intelligent, but ill-informed; and, from disposition and habit, unequal to atten-

tion. The affection which subsisted between them could not be equal. On one side it was the tenderness, sometimes the compassion, of an elder sister for a variable, neglected, unstable mind: on the other, it was the devotion to a superior being. The Countess saw this, and it grieved her. The affection which we cannot return is a gift we would fain bestow upon another, and Beatrice Novera trusted that the time would soon arrive when the object of her daily care might find a love on which to rest her hopes of happiness. She would fain have left Lucia in Italy, under the guardianship of her father's friend; so the tie between them might have been gently severed. But though the proposal was acceded to at first, it was soon repented of. Lucia almost insisted upon accompanying the Countess to England, though aware that the feelings which in general lay dormant in Italy, where she had no rival, might be awakened to intensity in a foreign land. Since the death of her husband the Countess Novera had become more English in all her tastes. They were natural to her; and her Italian habits had been grafted upon, but had not superseded, them. She had loved her husband devotedly, for though Italian by birth, and enthusiastically attached to his country, his mind had been formed, and his disposition moulded by a constant intimacy with the Viscount de Lisle. His wife's hopes, and wishes, and pursuits had all been his likewise; and in religion there was the most perfect unanimity. The advancement of the Church of Rome was their great desire; and it was to satisfy her husband's anxiety upon this subject, that the Countess had bound herself by the vow which she had now repeated to Father Andrea. There was no sacrifice required in making it; Beatrice had no affections to tempt her to look favourably upon heretics, and only regretted that

the Count Novera should deem it possible for any circumstance to induce her to exercise more than the common Christian charity towards them which religion and relationship demanded. But in satisfying him, she was satisfied herself; and the vow was as yet so little of a restraint, as frequently to be forgotten. Still in re-visiting England, after the lapse of two years from the period of her husband's death, the Countess was aware that she was not without some degree of sympathy for those who were separated from her upon the most important of all points. She felt that it would be a satisfaction to renew the acquaintance with persons whom she had known in her happier days; and the thought of a relation was a relief, for when we are left alone in this bleak world the heart will often cling with tenacity to connections which have little beyond the name to render them inviting. England was now considered more as the scene of her infantine recollections than as the land of heretics; and Henningsley was remembered with a degree of affection that can only attach to our birth-place. It was this change of feeling which had first excited Lucia Fontana's suspicious dread. The Countess might visit England, and she might never return again. She would dwell amongst her new friends, and the ties of a distant land would be forgotten. True, there was one great barrier, and the Countess was bound to the faith of her fathers by early association and long habit; by the memories of her parents and her husband; and by the fervent spirit of piety which was strengthened by her heavy trial; — but Father Andrea had once allowed the existence of a slight uneasiness upon this subject to drop from his lips, and from that time Lucia's resolution was taken not to leave her. The countess foresaw pain for her companion, and discomfort for herself, in

the plan; but the confessor advised it, and this outweighed her own objections.

Father Andrea Muratone had been her adviser from childhood, and not only hers, but her father's and her mother's also. Many years of his life had been spent in England, in study, and in active service for the Church of Rome; and at that period he first became acquainted with the Viscount de Lisle. Circumstances afterwards induced him to return to Italy, but the friendship was still retained; and when the Viscount at length settled with his family at Florence, Father Andrea, in the capacity of confessor, became his dearest and most confidential friend. To the Countess Novera he was not only a father in religion, but in the ordinary affairs of life. His affection was the great tie which still bound her to earth; and the austere, subdued, and, to many, harsh-mannered Romish priest, though seldom betraying the full extent of his regard, yet allowed himself to cherish an affection for his spiritual child which was only inferior to his devotion to his Church.

The Countess but little dreaded his severity, for the feelings which existed beneath it were well understood; but she did not choose to disobey his express wishes, and was too confident in her own strength of principle to imagine that Father Andrea had insisted upon the necessity of Lucia's accompanying them more because her very defects might be of assistance, in enabling him to keep a strict watch over the mind entrusted to his guidance, than from any consideration for the comfort or the happiness of either. The confessor imagined he had decided wisely before they left Italy, but the experience of even a few days' residence in England was now effecting a change in his opinion.

CHAPTER XV.

Two months afterwards Miss Debrett was summoned to her parlour window by her maid Jenkins, to watch a foreign travelling carriage and four, as it passed rapidly along the London road, and took the turning to the right in the direction of Henningsley.

"'Tis she, sure enough," said Jenkins, soliloquising, as was her wont, for her mistress's amusement; 'I knew she was expected this afternoon."

"Poor young thing!" sighed Miss Debrett, "it's but a sad return for her."

"Sad indeed, ma'am: such a dismal old place! eaten up with rats; Mrs. Collins says, they are out in the kitchen every night, and all over the house."

"You don't say so, Jenkins; but I thought a great deal had been done to put it in order."

"So people said, ma'am, but cousin Ben at Mr. Locke's tells me it's no such thing. He went up to Henningsley last Sunday, to see the housekeeper, and he says there is not above five bed-rooms fit to put a dog into, and only the dining and drawing-rooms and one other small one. Ben was quite surprised, but Mrs. Collins told him 'twas all nonsense about the lady going to live there. She's to come here just to look at it; and then the agent's to have it for a summer place."

"Well, to be sure, Jenkins! what stories people do tell! but I'm sorry now to hear it. Three and twenty years;—yes, just three and twenty it is,

since the family went away; and I liked the thought of her coming back."

"So did a good many people," replied Jenkins; but for my part I can't see what good papist folks are to do anywhere."

"No, certainly, I never thought of that; but Jenkins, there were three people in the carriage, weren't there?"

"Two ladies, and a queer-looking man," replied Jenkins. "I dare say Ben will find out all about them before long."

"I shall just step over to Mrs. Percival's and tell her I have seen them," said Miss Debrett; "she will be glad to know they are come."

"Baker was over here just now, ma'am," said Jenkins, "and she says Mrs. Percival's as busy as possible, with the wedding clothes; she's quite proud about it all, and the doctor likes it now, though he didn't much fancy it at first."

"Indeed, then I must go directly. I dare say the colonel's had the day fixed at last."

"'Tisn't so very long," said Jenkins, "but I dare say, ma'am, they ar'nt sorry to have it settled quickly. It's not often such a lucky chance falls in people's way."

"No; there you're quite right, Jenkins," said Miss Debrett, simply; "I do long to see my dear Agatha a bride."

"Yes, she'll make a very fine one; there is no doubt of that," replied Jenkins, "and a power of money they say is to be spent upon the dresses. Baker promises I shall have a sight of them."

"It's quite right, Jenkins; people are not married often in their lives, and so they should make the most of it when they are."

"Miss Percival knows well enough how to make the most of every thing, I suspect, ma'am,"

said Jenkins sharply, "to my mind Miss Margaret's worth twenty such."

"Well, I don't know, Jenkins, perhaps—but I can't tell—Agatha's a beautiful girl; and to be sure, Margaret is extremely kind. I hope you put by that almond soap she brought me from France."

"Oh yes, it's all safe, ma'am," replied Jenkins, giving a hasty answer to a question which was repeated regularly every day.

"I shall use it some time or other, Jenkins; but it's too good for me; my shrivelled hands are not fit for it. I promised Margaret though, that I would open it on Agatha's wedding day."

"There's the colonel just crossing the road now, ma'am," said Jenkins: "certain he does'nt look a bit like a man fit to be married."

"Hush! Jenkins, you should'nt say so. He's not so young as he was, and not altogether so handsome, but he won't make the worse husband for that. Get my shawl, will you, and my bonnet and gloves."

Jenkins remained at the window till she had lost sight of the colonel, and Miss Debrett waited patiently till her maid's curiosity was satisfied. She made it a point of duty never to hurry any one, because she said she knew so well what it was to be hurried herself; and the shawl and bonnet and gloves being brought in due course of time, and very carefully put on, Miss Debrett went out, leaving a last injunction to Jenkins to take care that the soup was ready for old Widow Wallace, and to tell the cook to save all the pieces of bread for the family in Chalk Lane.

The arrival of the Countess Novera had been remarked by many besides Miss Debrett. Some had expected and were looking out for it; others were attracted by the novelty of the carriage; and a few

noticed it accidentally. Amongst the last-mentioned was Mr. Sutherland. He was walking with Margaret. It was their first walk together since her return, notwithstanding his engagement; for pressing duties had interfered with his being at the Grove before. Margaret was not sorry to have the opportunity of writing, instead of speaking her sentiments regarding Agatha's marriage. She could not trust herself, and she was beginning to see that hasty words, even when the motive is justifiable, and no evil consequences are to be apprehended from them, are in themselves wrong. Mr. Sutherland sent her a short answer, but it expressed all that Margaret expected. "Congratulations," he said, "he could not offer. Wishes he could, and did from the very bottom of his heart." Then came regrets at his disappointment at being kept at Alton, and the promise that he would ride over on the earliest day possible.

This day proved to be the one on which the Countess arrived at Henningsley. Margaret had heard nothing concerning it, and had but little leisure for indulging her romance amidst the business realities of her home. Her mother's energy, increased tenfold by delight in Agatha's splendid prospects, and a constant fidgetty anxiety lest every thing should not go smoothly, would in itself have been amply sufficient to occupy her time, if not her thoughts; but there was another subject which pressed upon her mind more than any of the circumstances actually connected with her sister's marriage. That event was fixed beyond her power to alter it; but it had opened her eyes to the necessity of imbuing the children with very different principles from those which had been inculcated upon Agatha. The incidents of family life teach much to those who have hearts open to instruction;

and Margaret was now alive to many defects which before had passed unnoticed. It signified little that the world pronounced Agatha fortunate, that her mother exulted in private, or that her father, after the first surprise of the announcement, gave his free consent: Margaret's sense of honour and delicacy was shocked, for to her Agatha's utter absence of affection was glaring. From her inmost heart she resolved that she would spare neither time nor labour in bringing up the children with higher principles. She would watch them, check them, be constantly with them. Her first mania for education returned with nearly its original force. Plans and theories, and a certain improvement in matters of practice followed; and then disappointment. But Margaret was not again to be baffled by difficulties. There was a root of strength within her, or rather the strength which had been bestowed in infancy, was once more reviving, and promising to bring forth fruit, thirty, sixty, it might be a hundred-fold. She was alone, indeed, in her endeavours as far as human aid could assist her, except when she could apply to her uncle; but even in the course of a few weeks, notwithstanding the distractions of care, and pleasure, and business, Margaret had learnt and felt something of that enduring peace which is the inner life of a Christian. She could pray, and pray in earnest, and conscience bore witness to her sincerity, even when it most accused her of sins and neglect. Yet at times the vagueness and unsatisfactoriness of her former views seemed to return. It was peculiarly so when she thought of her younger sisters. If they were to grow up without rule or object as she had done; if they were to live lives of self-indulgence, frittering their talents, occupying themselves in discovering how time was to be spent, not used, what could

shield them from narrow worldly ideas? It seemed a miracle that she herself should ever have attained to the prospect of any thing beyond. With her brothers there might be more hope. They would be thrown into the world and forced to struggle with difficulties. The duties of their professions and the interests of their country would be to them a centre for ambition. There would be something external to themselves to act both as a stimulus and a check, and in belonging to a body, they would feel that their existence was of consequence, and lose the petty sense of individuality which seems the bane of a woman's life, especially when unmarried. Margaret felt that something was wanting, both for her own satisfaction, and the welfare of her sisters, but she knew not where to seek it. Mr. Sutherland's conversation recurred to her; but though she had acted upon his expressed wishes, and in so doing had gained a comfort she could not have anticipated, there was still much that he had said which, from not having been clearly understood, was but faintly remembered. Her impression was that he had used rather exaggerated language, not as to the importance of Christianity, but as to its power of gratifying that longing for some tangible object of interest which had driven her to take refuge from a world of sense in one of shadows. Religion, she thought, might occupy the place of universal philanthropy; but it could never be like the spirit of patriotism. Its extent was too vast, and its elements were too incongruous. She was a Christian, but so were Independents, Baptists, Quakers, primitive Methodists, Wesleyans, Swedenborgians,—yet what communion could there be between them? Margaret sighed and blamed herself for discontent and want of faith. Ought she to require more than had been

given her? Would it not be better to concern herself with the simple duties before her, and not wish for any thing greater? Home was a woman's sphere, the world was a man's. If she could govern her own heart, and teach the children to govern theirs; or, more truly, if she could trust the work in His hands who alone can order the "unruly wills and affections" of sinful beings, she ought to be satisfied.

Margaret said to herself, what many of her age and sex have said before her; what hundreds, thousands, have acted upon, and in sincerity and humility have fulfilled the duties of their station, and gone to their graves in peace, followed by the tears of their friends, and the blessings of the fatherless and the widow. But there are others, the gifted, the enthusiastic, the poetical, conscious of high intellectual powers, and believing themselves, perhaps justly, equal to men in all but physical strength, and sobriety of judgment, whose whole life is a struggle between the inferiority of their natural position and the cravings of an ardent, highly-cultivated mind. Too simple and retiring to desire for an instant to occupy a prominent position, they yet feel themselves capable of something higher than they dare to undertake. The wish, "if I were but a man," passes the lips, and raises a smile, and is forgotten; but it is no transitory feeling which prompts it. Its utterance may be checked by reserve, and a dread of being misunderstood; but in solitude it rises again and again; first, as a desire to do good to others, then as a temporary discontent, then, it may be, as repining, and at length, as a settled, fretting, cankering evil, which perhaps terminates in the neglect of small duties, because greater ones are not within reach. It was this wish which was now arising in Margaret's breast. She longed to be working for

some object besides her own improvement; but she had no idea that religion could furnish it. Sometimes she fancied herself a clergyman, devoting himself to the improvement of his parish: sometimes a statesman, dedicating himself to his country's service: sometimes a general, winning kingdoms by the success of his armies; or even a soldier in that army, fighting under laws and strict discipline. In each case there was the exertion for some definite purpose, independent of self. Her purpose, she said to herself in her most thoughtful moment, ought to be to extend the kingdom of Christ upon earth: it would be so, she hoped, in time; but her faith was too weak to seize upon such an object, as it would upon something visible and earthly.

But, happily for Margaret, the day of dreams was over, at least they were never long encouraged. Practical duties surrounded her, and she engaged in them at once, energetically though ignorantly, and with no very definite aim. She formed rules for herself and the children, which were enforced strictly one day, and the next altered, because proved to be mistaken. She fixed upon a certain plan for her religious duties, especially for reading the Bible; and then changed because she imagined another would suit her better. She determined to exert herself for the poor, but not knowing how to begin, she gave away money upon unworthy objects, because she had no one to direct her efforts aright. All these mistakes Margaret made, and many more; whilst at the same time she was distressed at Agatha's marriage, worried with the children's faults, teased perpetually by her mother, not at all comfortable at the tone of Craven's letters, and pained at the conviction that personal religion alone could not satisfy all her needs, or make her thoroughly contented with her position in life. An inferior mind and a less

sincere disposition might, under such difficulties, have returned to its former state; but Margaret was not to be easily frightened from the path of duty. With a vigorous effort she threw aside all her internal anxieties, until she could talk them over with her uncle, and walked boldly forward by the light which had already been vouchsafed. Whatever task presented itself, she looked at it fully, and resolved how it was to be performed. Even when most bewildered by conflicting claims, by the attention required to her mother and the children, the necessity of studying herself, the calls upon her time from her numerous acquaintances, she still did something; generally that which was most disagreeable: whilst the remembrance of her past neglects, and the sense of gratitude for unmerited mercies became day by day stronger, and urged her onwards when she might otherwise have been tempted to sit down in despair. Mr. Sutherland's visit was now the one thing to which Margaret looked for comfort. Once or twice she thought of writing to him upon the subject of her dissatisfactions; but he was daily expected at the Grove, and it was difficult to express such vague feelings by words; they required looks and tones to render them intelligible; and then her uncle could understand half sentences, he could anticipate her thoughts; and thus often save her the pain of mentioning them; and in the hope of seeing him, Margaret determined it would be best, upon the whole, to bear her burden patiently, and wait till his arrival before she sought relief; though she did now and then grow a little impatient, and wish that Alton was a few miles nearer, so that they might go and return the same day; or that the curate lived in another house, so that she might stay with her uncle, as he had often expressed a wish that she

should do. Mr. Sutherland came, and Margaret, to his surprise, was shy. She had never hitherto been reserved with him; but her views were at last real, not theoretical, and she could scarcely bring herself to speak of them. And what could she say of Agatha, or rather, what would her uncle say? Agatha herself was a little uncomfortable upon the occasion, and contrived to be engaged from home as soon as she heard her uncle was expected, in order that they might not meet till dinner time. But she need not have been afraid. Mr. Sutherland neither said nor looked any thing different from usual. He avoided a private interview with his sister, and in reply to her anticipations of happiness, merely hoped that Agatha had chosen wisely.

"Wisely! my dear Henry, how very strangely you talk!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival. "What can be more wise? — a good husband and a capital house, and a large fortune to keep it up. You are really absurd."

Mr. Sutherland smiled that sort of smile which is very nearly a sigh; and speaking to Grace, who happened to enter the room at the moment, asked her to run upstairs and see if Margaret were ready to go out with him. Mrs. Percival could not interpret his countenance; but she saw he was not disposed for conversation, and left him in a pitying mood, saying to herself, "Poor fellow! it is no wonder; after that sad loss he never can hear of marriages with any pleasure."

CHAPTER XVI.

"We must go into the town first," said Margaret, as she took her uncle's arm." "I have a little shopping to do: not very much though, so you need not take fright."

"I don't think I should stay at home, even if I did," replied Mr. Sutherland. "It is more than two months since you and I walked together."

"Two months in time, and twelve in feeling," said Margaret.

"Yes, fully that, I am sure. I was very glad you wrote to me about Agatha; not that I could have had any serious doubts of what your opinion would be."

"I imagine that my opinion is a general one in this instance," said Margaret. "Amongst all the congratulations, there has not been one hearty one except Miss Debrett's.

"And hers was from genuine kindness," said Mr. Sutherland. "It is not in her creed that any one bearing the name of Percival should do a wrong or imprudent action."

"If she live long enough she will be disabused of that error," observed Margaret. "I am not very old, and not very much given to prophesy; but I sometimes think I see the faint cloud in the distance, which is to gather and burst over our heads."

"Let us leave it in the distance," replied Mr. Sutherland, gravely; "unless we have the power to disperse it. Our life is the present."

"And a very unsatisfactory one it is," said Margaret. "Not from the old causes exactly," she added, seeing disappointment in her uncle's face, "I am not going to tease you with my former discontents."

"You never tease me by anything; but I hoped you would have tried to work out for yourself the principles we talked about the day I met you at Deering."

"I did," said Margaret. "You never expressed a wish yet which I did not regard as a command; and I have learnt much, I hope, at least as to my own position; but there have been such distractions since."

"Yes, that French journey; I want to hear it in detail when you can give it."

"I fancied I should have spoken of nothing else," replied Margaret; "and now it seems gone; — past, as if it were an event of ten years ago."

"And the Countess Novera, too?" inquired Mr. Sutherland.

Margaret laughed. "I did not think you would even have remembered her name. No; she is not past, but future. She is to be here very soon."

"I remember her mother," said Mr. Sutherland; "just before they left Henningsley I was staying in the neighbourhood, and she paid a farewell visit to my friends. I was a mere boy at the time, yet I shall never forget her. It was a more perfect figure, and countenance and manner, than I can ever expect to see again."

"Wait till the Countess arrives," said Margaret.

"You say she is like the picture at Henningsley; if so, she does not resemble her mother. There is pride in that picture."

Margaret was slightly vexed, though she would

not have hesitated to make the same observation herself.

"Perhaps there may be something of that expression in the Countess's face," she replied; "it is in the mouth; but her smile is peculiarly soft and sweet."

As she said this, Margaret stopped at the door of a shop, not unwilling to discontinue the conversation. A tone of criticism was the last in which she desired the Countess or any person connected with her to be mentioned; but she had written lightly about their meeting at Rouen, fancying that, as a man, Mr. Sutherland would be inclined to ridicule her sudden girlish prepossession; and he had no idea that any thing he said could be disagreeable to her.

Margaret's purchases were soon completed, and they walked farther down the street. The dull town was unusually lively; shop-boys had left the counters, and were standing at the doors, watching apparently for something which was to arrive from the London road; about half a dozen people were gathered together at the corners; and occasionally a head was seen peeping over a blind. Mr. Sutherland pointed out to Margaret these indications of curiosity, which he observed always amused him, as specimens of country-town life; but Margaret made no remark in return, for she had fallen into a musing mood, and was a little chilled by what her uncle had said. There could be no perfect sympathy, unless he could understand the sources of her interest, and she was afraid he could not. Perhaps no man could, but this was a disappointing thought.

The shopping was finished, and they were leaving the town, when a carriage drove rapidly up the street, and the symptoms of curiosity increased.

Heads were bent forward, and old men rested on their sticks, and young children put down their baskets, to stop and look about them. Mr. Sutherland and Margaret stopped also, to inquire who was expected; but the man to whom they referred for information was as ignorant as themselves.

"'Tis the lady from over the seas, Sir," said a boy who overheard Mr. Sutherland's question; "they've been watching for her all the afternoon."

"And what makes them all so wish to see her?" inquired Margaret, with eagerness.

"Because they say she's a power of money, and means to give away soup every week," replied the boy.

Mr. Sutherland walked on slowly; but Margaret was certain that his interest was as much awakened as she could have expected. A few moments brought the carriage near. Something was amiss with the harness, and there was a little delay whilst one of the postillions put it right. A mob of boys was collecting, but Mr. Sutherland kept them off, and in doing this approached so close that he had a full view of the Countess's features. She was looking pale and rather melancholy, but her glance was quick and animated. She was trying to recall the faint images of her childish days; and occasionally she spoke to Lucia and Father Andrea in a tone of satisfaction. Margaret was standing apart; and believing herself hidden, was gazing more intently than she was aware of. As the postillion remounted she advanced to take her uncle's arm. The Countess leant forward, saw her, and turned directly to Father Andrea; but the signs of recognition were lost upon Margaret; she moved aside; the Countess sank back in the carriage, the word was given, and the postillions drove off; and Margaret again found herself walking leisurely up the High Street of Staunton, with feelings of excitement and ex-

pectation which a few minutes before had seemed dead within her.

"Yes, she is beautiful!" was Mr. Sutherland's first exclamation; "words could scarcely exaggerate."

"Beautiful and unhappy," replied Margaret; "there is more of sorrow than of pride in her face."

"Something of each: she does not resemble her mother."

"She must be friendless here," said Margaret.

"I don't know; she has many relations, and she is not alone."

"That must have been her confessor," continued Margaret. "I forgot she was a Romanist."

"So did I too till I saw him. I wish she was an English churchwoman as well as an English lady: she might then do infinite good by living here."

"She is never English at all, to my mind," said Margaret: "her voice, and manner, and the very expression of her countenance, are foreign."

"Yes; and one cannot help regretting it. These are not days in which the nobility of England can be spared from the Church."

"But you would not exclude the Countess Novera from being useful, because she cannot agree with you upon particular points of doctrine?"

"She may be useful in giving away money," replied Mr. Sutherland; "but that is not what we require now. England and English people cannot be benefited by efforts exterior to the Church."

"You will be shocked at me, I know," said Margaret; "but there is scarcely any thing more vague to me than the idea of working for the Church."

"No," replied Mr. Sutherland, "I am not shocked: your feeling is that of many, and it has

been the growth of years of neglect and false principles. But, Margaret, have you never felt the want of such an object — something visible to which to attach yourself?"

"Yes, indeed." Margaret spoke earnestly, for the question brought to her remembrance the floating dissatisfactions which she had lately been striving to banish. "But I fancied the wish was a wrong one," she added; "that it arose from my own weakness; and that I ought to be contented with trying to do good to myself and to the persons immediately about me, — the children, for instance, and the poor."

"So far you were right, that we are all limited to a certain sphere of action, and must be contented with it; but do you not see the immense difference between working in that sphere, with the idea that it is part of a great whole, and working in it as an isolated individual?"

"We cannot really be isolated," said Margaret, "because all Christians form but one body — the Epistle to the Ephesians says so."

"It says," replied Mr. Sutherland, "that we are to endeavour to keep 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; because there is one body, and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.' Now look at Unitarians, denying the divinity of our Lord, and calling themselves Christians; look at Baptists, enforcing adult baptism alone; look at Wesleyans, and Independents, and the countless sects of the present day, making both the sacraments mere signs, and all differing from each other and from the Church in their forms of government, where can the 'one body' be found amongst them?"

"Spiritually they may be one," said Margaret.

"Was it merely spiritually in the primitive ages,

when the apostles appointed elders and rulers in every church; when it was said that if one member suffered, all the members suffered with it; or, in later days, when strangers travelling to a foreign land, carried commendatory letters to the bishop, and were received at once as parts of the great Christian family? The unity of those days was a visible unity — the body was a visible body."

"But," said Margaret, "it seems vain to go back so far; after the innumerable changes which have passed over the world, have we any right to expect that the forms of religion should continue unaltered?"

"Except that the Church of Christ is of divine origin, and therefore, like her Lord, unchangeable."

"Then, where are we to look, what are we to do?" exclaimed Margaret, quickly. "Facts are against you."

"Nay, I beg your pardon; facts are for me. The bishops of the English branch of the Catholic Church are regularly descended from the apostles; the faith of the English Church is the faith of the apostles; the prayers of the English Church are the prayers, if not of the apostles, yet of their immediate successors; and, therefore, to work for the English Church, is to work for one of the parts of that body, of which our Lord himself is the head."

"And all others are to be excluded," began Margaret, gravely.

Mr. Sutherland interrupted her: "Yours is the common mistake, my dear Margaret. You fancy that because a man strongly asserts his own privileges, he must necessarily deny them to others. We have nothing to do with others; to their own Master they must stand or fall. God forbid that I, or any human being, should presume to confine the mercies of Christ within the strict limits of the

visible Church. All that I wish to make you perceive is, that we have certainty on our side — certainty that we are descended from the apostles, and have received the true faith ; and therefore that it ought to be our wish that all others should be brought to a like certainty."

"But the unity of the Church must mean something more than the Church of one particular nation," said Margaret.

"Of course it does ; it includes all Churches which are really Churches, descended from the apostles and adhering to the true faith."

"And union between Romanists and ourselves?" inquired Margaret, doubtfully.

"You are inclined to be argumentative, I see, my dear child," said Mr. Sutherland ; "and if so, perhaps this conversation may do you more harm than good."

"No, indeed," replied Margaret, gently ; "if I could realise all I think you mean, it might add very much to my happiness. But my thoughts turned then to the Countess Novera."

"And to my regret, I suppose, that she does not belong to the English Church," said Mr. Sutherland; "but I am not going to enter upon the subject of the relative position of the two Churches. It is a very deep and intricate one, requiring accurate historical knowledge, and not necessary for the regulation of your daily conduct. All that is required for you is the knowledge that you belong to a true branch of the Catholic Church, and ought to devote your utmost energies to its service."

Margaret was a very little annoyed. She did not like her question being put aside, and there was a slight tone of pique in the remark which followed : "It would be difficult to devote any thing to the Church at Deering."

Mr. Sutherland understood her thoughts, and answered them. "You must forgive me, my love," he said. "The last thing I should wish to do would be to refuse to enter upon any question which interests you; but this one involves controversy, and is likely to be dangerous, if only as withdrawing your attention from practical duties."

Mr. Sutherland's forbearance never failed to be a reproof to Margaret's hastiness; and she was vexed with herself as she replied, "I know you are right, and I am proud. Some faults I shall never cure: that is one."

"Not so, Margaret; all faults are curable. If they cannot on earth be entirely uprooted, they may always be kept under by a strong hand. To doubt this is to be wanting in faith."

"And I am wanting in faith," said Margaret, "I am aware of it constantly. Lately nothing satisfies me, because I cannot be contented with spiritual instead of visible objects. I have prayed, and thought, and formed rules, and acted—yes, indeed, I have acted upon them;—but all seems petty. A woman's life must be so,"—and she sighed deeply.

Mr. Sutherland considered a little, and then said, "But if you are acting under a system, bound down by rules, having your appointed work to do; a work as efficacious for the prosperity of a great body as is the government of its rulers—what will become of the pettiness then?"

"Mysteries," replied Margaret; "you often deal in them; and you speak of men."

"No, believe me; I speak of women, English women, the members of the English Church."

Margaret looked up in surprise.

"You would agree with me, I am sure," continued Mr. Sutherland, "if you could once realise what the Church truly is; not a sect, not a num-

ber of persons voluntarily uniting under a self-constituted government; but a body governed by the laws of our Lord and his apostles; its ministers appointed to be the channels through which the sacraments of grace are administered; and its members, even the humblest, forming the stones of that glorious building which must last for ever. No earthly polity can claim half the love and loyalty which is due to the Church."

"But where is this polity?" asked Margaret. "I can understand loyalty to a sovereign, and love to a country: they come before me, not actually, but through representatives; but loyalty to the Church seems to me to consist in little except going to hear Mr. Stanley instead of John Dyer, the Plymouth Brother."

Mr. Sutherland sighed, and his countenance assumed a graver expression than before.

"Forget Deering," he said, "if you can. The Church is not formed of one individual clergyman. Something of the polity you can see in the bishops and the different orders in the Church, which stand in the same relationship to the body as the rulers of a state do to the nation at large. The laws ought to come home to your daily practice; they ought to regulate your conduct."

"They do," said Margaret; "they make me go to church every Sunday."

"Weekly conduct, that is," replied Mr. Sutherland; "I mean literally every day."

A pause followed. Margaret was conscious she had spoken lightly, and presently said in a tone of humility—"You must not be angry with me; and if you will tell me all you mean, I will try and do what you recommend. I did try the last time after we had talked together."

"I scarcely know what to recommend now," he

said. "My real wish is to put the idea into your head,—to make you understand that the Church is a visible body, and that you are a part of it, and ought to seek its advancement and be governed by its rules. But I will ask you one question: suppose you could once comprehend this to be the case, do you not think it would add dignity to your life? that it would give you an object independent of your individual improvement, or even of the improvement of the persons immediately about you?"

"Yes, it might; it would, I think," replied Margaret, hesitatingly.

"But it is so difficult to grasp the idea," said Mr. Sutherland, with a smile; and then relapsing into his former manner, he added,—"Yes, it is indeed difficult. Our own sins, and the sins of our forefathers, lie with a fearful weight upon us. But, Margaret, there is one thing always within our reach: prayer that our eyes may be opened, and that we may be able to understand the excellency of our Church, and may live more worthily of our calling, as her members."

Margaret was touched by the earnestness of her uncle's voice. She had not seen before how near the subject was to his heart. But the walk was ended, and they stood at the Grove gate, and Margaret was just going to enter when a quick exclamation was heard of—

"Margaret, my dear, how fortunate!" and they were joined by a third person.

"And Mr. Sutherland, too!" began Miss Debrett, when she approached near enough to hold out her hand, and give a hearty shake; "really, I am so very glad. I have not seen you I can't tell the time when."

"My uncle has not been here for two months," said Margaret.

"No, I dare say not; you are too good, Mr. Sutherland, too busy. I know you will wear yourself out."

"Miss Debrett does not mean what she says, I am sure," said Mr. Sutherland; "too good we need none of us fear to be; and too busy it is scarcely possible to be in a parish like mine, though it is not a very large one."

"Ah! but the services, my dear Mr. Sutherland. You are not aware what you are doing. Twice every day, I am told; and schools, and catechising, and all the poor people. I wonder you are alive to talk of it."

Margaret looked at her uncle rather anxiously.

"I think you are growing thin," she said.

"Yes, to be sure he is, my dear," observed Miss Debrett, "he starves himself. I hear every one is doing it. Why don't you go, and stay with him, Margaret, and take care of him?"

Margaret was amused, and said she was afraid that the curate who lived in the house would rather stand in the way; and sixteen miles was too great a distance to go and return, so that she had but little opportunity of knowing any thing about him.

"Well, he must give himself a holiday," said Miss Debrett. "He will be obliged to do it soon. I venture to say now that I know more about some things than you do."

"Very probably," observed Margaret, who directly guessed the allusion.

"Very certainly," said Mr. Sutherland, playfully, "ladies' dresses, for instance."

"You are laughing at me, I know. You gentlemen always do, but I can keep my own secret. Thursday fortnight—we won't say what day that will be."

"A happy one, I hope," said Mr. Sutherland, seriously, "if it is to be Agatha's wedding-day."

"How could you guess? — but it is true; you lost the first hearing by being away."

"Ill news fly quickly," said Margaret, in a low voice, to her uncle.

"You are very odd people," continued Miss Debrett, looking at them both; "you don't seem at all pleased. But Margaret, my dear, you needn't be afraid; your turn will come by and by; and as for Mr. Sutherland, I expect to hear of his marriage every day."

Margaret felt her uncle's arm hastily withdrawn. He dropped his stick, and stooped to pick it up. Miss Debrett, with all her kind-heartedness, had no perception of the years which may pass by and still leave a wound unhealed; and would have gone on in the same bantering strain, if Margaret, who was sensitively alive to any thing which wounded her uncle, had not dexterously diverted the current of her ideas, by enquiring whether Colonel Clive was in the house.

"No, my dear, he's gone; just this moment left: but I heard all that passed. They did not mind an old woman like me, and Agatha would not go and talk to him alone; she was shy, and she looked uncomfortable, quite white, indeed. It was all the Colonel could do to make her settle exactly, and, I think, if it had not been for your mother, she would not have had the courage at last."

"Courage!" repeated Margaret, emphatically: yes, courage it must have required, indeed."

"Well, I don't know, my dear; I think, when a woman has once made up her mind, the sooner every thing is brought to an end the better. There's many a slip — you know the old proverb, Mr. Sutherland."

Mr. Sutherland did know it well, and blamed himself for his weakness, in allowing the associations connected with it to give him so much pain. Margaret noticed a certain quivering of the lips, which was almost the only sign he ever gave of internal agitation, and walked on, hoping that Miss Debrett might take leave. The hint was received, but Miss Debrett, after parting, returned to assure them that the Countess was arrived, and to give them an accurate description of her.

"Great events always come double, my dear mother used to tell me. Not that this one is any thing like Agatha's marriage; don't think I meant to compare them; but still it's something. Directly I saw the carriage go by, I said to myself, that it would not be the only thing which would happen to-day, and so you see it proved. But, good bye, I won't keep you any longer. You must be longing to go to dear Agatha."

"Dreading — she should have said," observed Margaret, as they stood before the door.

Mr. Sutherland kept her from entering the house.

"I must depend upon you for one thing," he said. "If possible, do not let me be asked to solemnise the marriage. You will understand the reason. If our fears for Agatha's happiness should be realised —"

"Yes, yes," said Margaret, quickly, "trust me, you shall not be called upon."

"And, Margaret, one thing more."

Mr. Sutherland hesitated, and a tinge of colour spread itself over his face, and was succeeded by unusual paleness.

"I should be sorry — I could not quite bear your mother to think I have any other cause for declining. She distresses me, sometimes, by allusions."

He stopped, and Margaret did not look at him, but in a gentle voice she said,—

"Colonel Clive's cousin, the Dean, is the proper person."

Mr. Sutherland pressed her hand affectionately, and Margaret hastened to the drawing-room, though with unwilling steps, to hear the particulars of what had passed, and to exert her ready tact in preventing her uncle from being obliged to say or do any thing which might give him pain.

CHAPTER XVII.

The autumnal morning sun was shining into the drawing-room at Henningsley. Long years had gone by since it had shed its brightness in that spot upon any thing but the remains of former splendour; and even now, there was less of the refinement of modern times, than of the cumbrous magnificence of by-gone generations, in the appearance of the apartment. Tapestried chairs with faded gilt backs, still were used instead of luxurious couches; the walls were wainscoted in white, and gilded; the glasses were inserted in the panels, and the lines which joined the different portions, showed that they belonged to an age when enormous pier-glasses were unknown. Thick damask curtains, festooned over the windows, hung in heavy folds to the ground, upon which was spread a carpet of splendid design, but so dimmed in colour, that in parts the outline could hardly be traced: and though a few choice modern ornaments were placed upon the high carved chimney-piece, and the inlaid cabinets, they were little in unison with the furniture. Henningsley was a relic of past ages, hastily refitted to suit the need of the fastidious, but, perhaps, less pure taste of more civilised times, and the contrast it afforded to the costly decorations of London was striking to the eye of the Countess Novera, and painful to that of her companion. Lucia's countenance was scarcely more cheerful now that she had attained her wishes, and saw that the Countess had escaped unaltered from the attractions of the metro-

polis, than it had been upon her first landing in England.

"You will find it lonely here, Signora," she said, as, on the morning after her arrival, she came into the room in which the Countess was standing, gazing upon the garden with an abstracted air.

"All things are lonely now, Lucia," was the reply, in a tone of sadness. "England or Italy, it must all be the same."

"But you will have no society as in London," continued Lucia, wishing to discover whether the Countess was satisfied.

"No, but I do not care for it yet. Lady Anstruther will come to me when I wish it, but I prefer quiet for the present."

"Certainly, it is not as if your whole life was to be spent here," pursued Lucia.

Beatrice did not answer the observation, and Lucia began her work. A long silence followed, first broken by the Countess.

"It was a curious meeting, yesterday," she exclaimed. "You did not remark her as I did. Her's is not a common face."

"English, decidedly," said Lucia, in concealed irritation.

"You could scarcely have seen her on your side of the carriage," continued the Countess. "She must be of foreign extraction, I imagine, which would account for her religion."

"There will soon be no difficulty in satisfying yourself, Signora," replied Lucia. "If you intend to receive visitors, you will easily gain the information which you so much desire."

Beatrice knew what this speech implied, but it did not render her cautious. "I shall inquire about her," she said carelessly. "It will be a

comfort to us to feel that we are not alone amongst heretics."

"The comfort, no doubt, will be necessary for you, Signora," replied Lucia; "it is not so for me, I am contented."

The Countess looked at her with an expression of mingled sympathy and amusement, and exclaimed, "Really, Lucia, I must beg Father Andrea to interfere if this mood continues. I thought it was to have been left in London. But you must not be so childish. Come, I will read to you, and then you shall have an English lesson."

She took up a volume of Tasso, and turning to the opening canto, began to read, in a voice, the liquid tones of which seemed especially formed for the melody of the language. Lucia's sullen air appeared at first impenetrable; but as Beatrice proceeded, her imagination grew excited, and, after a time, laying down her work, she sat with her eyes riveted upon the Countess's beautiful face, on which there now rested an expression of enthusiasm, which was too often hidden by the shadow of an ever present grief. It was the expression in which Lucia delighted, for it recalled the days of their early acquaintance, when Beatrice, in the fulness of her happiness, would sometimes give utterance to secret visionary wishes, and tell of the dreams which were fostered by her husband's approbation, and of which the advancement of the Church was the one great object. Those seasons of unreserve had originally formed the connecting bond between two minds, otherwise totally dissimilar. Lucia had been educated strictly in attachment to the Romish Church, and the rhapsodies which Beatrice so eloquently poured forth had found a ready echo in her own heart. But years and sorrow gave a different tone to the Countess's character. She be-

came less excitable and more real: her religion was the religion of the heart, whilst Lucia's remained that of the imagination. There was little now to recall the union of past days, except when, on occasions like the present, the Countess forgot the self-command, which, on principle, she strove to exercise, and suffered herself to be visibly wrought upon by poetry, or an unusual interest in conversation.

"Listen, Lucia," she exclaimed, her eye kindling with delight, as she repeated, a second time, the concluding verse of the splendid speech in which Godfrey de Bouillon addresses the Egyptian ambassadors: —

> "Ma quando di sua aita ella ne privi,
> Per gli error nostri o per giudizi occulti
> Chi fia di noi ch' esser sepulto schivi,
> Ov 'i membri di Dio fur già sepulti?
> Noi morirem, nè invidia avremo ai vivi;
> Noi morirem ma non morremo inulti:
> Nè l'Asia riderà di nostra sorte,
> Nè pianta fia da noi la nostra morte."

"Ah! Lucia, those were days when life was, indeed, valuable. Heresies and schisms were unknown then; the battle of the church was with heathen nations, and not as now, too often, with those who ought to have been nurtured within her own fold."

"And who will never be recovered to it," said Lucia. "Father Andrea thinks there is little hope."

"He thinks cautiously," replied Beatrice. "If he has hope, he will not own it; and he fears the cold rationalising spirit of my countrymen. He says that the frozen currents of the north flow in their veins."

"Father Andrea reasons from what he hears, not

from what he sees," said Lucia, raising her deep, dark eyes to the Countess with a look of fond admiration.

"The hearing is more true than the seeing, Lucia," replied the Countess. "No one can judge by me. English though I am by birth, and English in a measure by principle,—I am not, and never can be, English in affection, to forget the land of my adoption — the centre of Christendom."

Lucia rose suddenly from her seat, and advancing to the Countess, knelt humbly by her side, and resting a hand upon her lap, said,—"Those were blessed words, Signora; would that Father Andrea had heard them!"

The Countess drew back as if offended, but immediately recovering herself, she stooped to kiss Lucia's forehead, and answered, playfully,—"Father Andrea is wiser than you, Carina. He knows me better."

"And you will not stay in England," exclaimed Lucia, hurried by impulse to the betrayal of all her hidden fears: "You will not forget Italy, and give yourself up to your false friends, and live and die amongst heretics."

"My movements must be determined by circumstances," replied the Countess, composedly. "Father Andrea is my counsellor, and what he advises will be done."

"Then we shall return," said Lucia, rising; but her manner was cold, and the Countess's heart reproached her.

"Do not doubt it, dear child," she said; 'and for yourself, I have said before, you have but to name the wish, and there shall not be a day's delay."

"No, no," exclaimed Lucia passionately; "it is always thus: you will not understand, you do not love me."

"Lucia!" the Countess's voice was quiet but

reproachful; and the proud spirit of the Italian girl struggled plainly with the warmth of her affections.

"You loved me once," she continued; "in Italy I was your chosen companion, but you turn from me now, you would send me to my country when it is robbed of all that made it precious. I trusted, and I am deceived."

"Lucia, this is language which I must not hear," replied the Countess, "for it is unjust: whilst with me, these scenes must not be repeated."

"Whilst, whilst!" repeated Lucia; "say rather that my trial will not be long; that you will not bear with me; that even now you have arranged for our separation."

"You speak in wilful error, Lucia," replied Beatrice, with forced serenity of manner; "you do not choose to remember the ties which bind us to each other."

"They may be broken; they are broken," exclaimed Lucia:— she concluded the sentence abruptly; and in a moment recovering the fixed manner which she had assumed at the commencement of the conversation, resumed her work.

The Countess gave way to a slight expression of impatience, but she was vexed with herself the next instant; and after again kissing Lucia affectionately, threw open the window and walked out into the garden. Relief for her spirits was much needed; for this was not the first scene of the kind which she had been compelled to endure in England. Something was happening frequently to call forth Lucia's jealousy; and each time the same reasoning and caressing were required to bring her again into good humour. Beatrice was weary of such a life, yet she was convinced that the fault lay only in an undue affection for herself, and it seemed wrong to

return it as she had done by cold words and colder looks. No wonder that Lucia was chilled by her manner — she would be more considerate on any future occasion.—But the resolution seemed like deception, a show of something which she did not feel. Love could not be watched, and checked or stimulated by prudence: its only value lay in its truth. There was a time — how many days, and weeks, and long long months did memory retrace, as the thought arose! when every thought was expressed only to be reciprocated: but that could never be again; the void which death had left could never be filled up; and for the few remaining years of her life (something within foretold that they would not be many), the sweetest hope that remained was a dedication of all which could yet be thought valuable to the service of God. In the first dreariness of sorrow after her husband's death, the Countess had looked to a convent as her only place of refuge from an unsympathising world; but her friends, and Father Andrea amongst them, had hesitated to encourage the idea. They saw what the Countess herself could not see, that her rank, and beauty, and talents, were formed for the world, and that the interests of the Church might be furthered by her remaining in it.

Beatrice gave up the idea, though not without great regret, and determined to occupy herself in the concerns of her property. Duty of any kind was a relief to the weight of affliction; and some who observed the cheerfulness and energy with which she prepared to engage in it, believed that her grief had been quite subdued. By such persons Beatrice Novera was not understood; they witnessed the resignation of a Christian, and they thought that it was the indifference of a common mind. Even Father Andrea was in part deceived,

especially during their stay in London. The Countess then saw many of her friends, and received the most flattering attentions. She was, for the time, pleased, and when she said that she was disappointed, and that amongst her numerous relations she had not found one who suited her taste, or with whom she could form a friendship; he imagined that she was ignorant of the state of her own mind, and that at Henningsley she would pine for the society which, when it was possessed, she appeared to value so lightly. His own heart was cast in a stern mould, and its movements were kept in rigid subjection. Life had passed, till the present hour, without bringing any severe trial; and though he had watched deep sorrow often, he had never experienced it himself. He imagined that the Countess could act, as in a similar case he could have acted himself; that she could shake off dejection upon principle, and throw her thoughts into a new channel; and when he saw her cheerful and occupied, he imagined that she had done so. He heard her indeed mourn over past recollections, and complain that life was dreary; but the words were merely words: they were often contradicted by what he saw, and many an anxious thought arose in his breast as he pictured the change which English habits and English affections might possibly make in her character. Beatrice herself did not at first realise the insipidity of the new world into which she was thrown. It was new and amusing, and for a short time she found real pleasure in renewing former acquaintances, and seeing all the wonders of the metropolis. Then the gratification began to pall; she was at home without a home. Her mother's cousin, Lady Anstruther, who had met her at Rouen, and travelled with her to England, proposed that she should take up her resi-

dence for some time with her ; but this was not practicable, since Father Andrea and Lucia were with her. The large apartments at the hotel, magnificent though they were, grew distasteful, and the Countess sighed for Henningsley.

The warmth of interest also with which she was received lasted much longer than her own satisfaction in it. She had been too much accustomed to homage to be elated by it, and real affection she soon saw was not given her ; she even blamed herself for having expected it. How could persons who had not met for years, and whose lives had been spent under totally different circumstances, and with no unity of sentiment upon religious subjects, be to each other more than common friends? Vexed with her relations, and unhappy in her own mind, Beatrice soon urged an immediate departure. If Henningsley could do no more for her, it could at least give her change ; and it would certainly renew the infantine associations which still haunted her indistinctly. It was the home of her father and her mother, and had been the frequent theme of their conversations ; and as Beatrice de Lisle, it had been the centre of her own childish imaginations though, as the Countess Novera, it had been comparatively but seldom remembered.

Father Andrea saw no reason to object, and suddenly, with but two days of preparation, the Countess left London. At the termination of her journey disappointment again awaited her. Henningsley, apparently uninhabited, standing in the middle of a park, which gave many indications of being seldom visited, was not an inviting object in its external appearance ; and when Beatrice entered the large hall, where no one, except her servants, was waiting to welcome her, and remembered the vague images of life and happiness, which had till

that hour been connected with it; a sense of utter solitariness overpowered her. Rank, wealth, beauty, would have been thankfully relinquished for the sake of one fond voice, one kiss of a father, a mother, or a husband's love. No wonder that on the following day, after her conversation with Lucia, the sense of loneliness and want of companionship should sink her spirits to the lowest ebb.

For a long time the Countess wandered by herself through the garden and the shrubberies. They had been lately carefully tended, but taste was still wanting for their perfection. Beatrice, however, gave no attention to them. The characteristic of her mind was that of being entirely possessed by one prominent idea. She walked and gazed, and even gathered flowers, but her thoughts were in a distant land, and it was not until suddenly recalled to her present situation by an object connected with one of the few childish offences which, from being severely punished, had made an indelible impression on her, that she remembered she was in her native home. A piece of trellis work formed one of the terminations of the terrace; and over this some rare creepers had once been trained. The brilliancy of the flowers had tempted her when very young to climb up a few steps, and the consequence had been a fall, and the demolition of a portion of the brittle wood. The offence was a slight one, but it aroused her mother's fear lest her clambering propensities should lead her into danger; and the punishment was so great that Beatrice believed it to be unjust, and her proud temper rebelled.

Every circumstance was now clearly retraced. The family were then on the eve of departure, and the broken trellis had been left unrepaired. And so it had remained, though not in its original state.

The creepers had overgrown it completely; but as the Countess removed a few of the twining stems, she could perceive the very place where the mischief had been perpetrated. There was no self-command then, and Beatrice rested her head against the trellis work and cried like a little child. She left the terrace hastily, and re-entering the house with a feeling of reverence, determined to examine it well, and endeavour to fix distinctly the scenes which were either remembered or had been described to her.

But this was found to be no easy task. The rooms which had been prepared for her use were alone habitable, and many of the others were completely blocked up with lumber. One had been originally used as a chapel, but from being the most spacious it was also the most useful and the best filled. And Beatrice turned away from it with increased depression of spirits. It reminded her of the difference between herself and her nearest relations, and made her feel more solitary in the world than before.

She thought of the English girl whom she had seen first at the hotel, and then praying in the Cathedral of St. Ouen, and whose face she had recognised the preceding day. After all, religion was the one great bond, more important far than relationship. And if, in this neighbourhood of strangers, she could meet with one of her own sex to worship in her forms, and with her sincerity, it would do more towards giving her a feeling of home during her stay at Henningsley, than any personal comforts which she might gather around her. Stay, the Countess called it now, for residence she could not believe that it ever would be. She even said to herself that she would leave it in a very few weeks.

All that could be required of her, she thought, would be an inspection of her property, and some inquiries as to her tenants; and when those duties were completed she would be at liberty to go wherever she chose. Yet Beatrice sighed. Liberty, in many, perhaps in most cases, is a curse and not a blessing.

Father Andrea was then sought, and his advice asked as to the proper mode of gaining minute particulars of the estates, and the manner in which they were overlooked; and two hours afterwards the Countess was closeted with Mr. Prior, her agent and solicitor, receiving information, and asking questions, which in her ignorance of English laws and customs were confusing to both parties.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was soon known in the neighbourhood, that the Countess Novera, although unwilling to enter into general society, was still desirous of being introduced to those families who had been personally acquainted with her father and mother ; and many, who could lay claim only to a distant knowledge of Lord and Lady de Lisle, hastened to call at Henningsley.

Margaret heard many discussions as to what it would be proper for her mother to do, without venturing a suggestion. Mrs. Percival was a stranger at the time when Henningsley was inhabited ; but Dr. Percival was just entering into practice, and had been summoned to a consultation several times in cases of illness. He had been treated with marked courtesy, and had no reason to believe that a visit from any person connected with him would be considered intrusive ; but Mrs. Percival rather objected. She said, that the acquaintance was merely professional, — that it would have been very different if it had been of long standing, but in fact it had only lasted about two years, and she had no wish to place herself in a false position, by presupposing an intimacy where in fact none had existed — the Countess's stay would probably be very short, and therefore the visit must be a matter of indifference. Mrs. Percival's opinion would have carried the day, and Margaret's reason and taste would have acquiesced, though not without considerable disap-

pointment, but that Mrs. St. Aubyn came unexpectedly to the support of her wishes. She had been at Henningsley, was charmed with the Countess, and convinced that she would in the end decide upon living there. As soon as she had made friends in the neighbourhood, the feeling of loneliness of which she now complained would be gone, and if Mrs. Percival did not call at once, the opportunity of forming the acquaintance would be lost. She had at least as much right as half the people who visited there; for it was well known by many persons that the Viscount de Lisle had entertained a great respect for Dr. Percival's talents, and it was certain that the Countess would receive the visit with pleasure, as she had remembered Dr. Percival's name when it was mentioned, and expressed herself interested in every one connected, however remotely, with her early days. After such counsel, from one so well versed in the ways of the world, Mrs. Percival could no longer doubt; and the visit to Henningsley was fixed for the following day.

Margaret listened with impatience for Agatha's answer to the inquiry, whether she was inclined to go. Lately her sister had appeared averse to morning visits, and it seemed natural enough, since she would of course dislike the observation which under her present circumstances she was likely to excite. Margaret had made up her mind that the reply would be in the negative; and her surprise was as great as her vexation, when Agatha expressed not merely willingness but pleasure in the proposal.

Margaret tried not to be provoked with her, but she could scarcely help being so. It really seemed as if she had been contradictory to her wishes on purpose. Her own introduction to the Countess was not likely, however, to be more than postponed, as

Agatha would so shortly be leaving her home; and Margaret endeavoured to be pleased at the future prospect, rather than annoyed at the present disappointment.

She had begun to perceive that every event in life is to be viewed on two sides, and on principle she was teaching herself to look at the brighter one; conscious that whilst she was striving to do her duty, it was also the truer one. Mr. Sutherland, who had not yet left them, felt for her as he always did. He had almost a woman's knack of understanding trifles and their influence upon daily happiness; and, instead of finding fault with Margaret because she looked graver than usual when the carriage drove off, he made her confess her vexation and talk of it till it was nearly gone. Still it returned again when Agatha came back, for she would tell nothing; or perhaps she had nothing to tell. The room had been filled with visitors, and she had scarcely spoken to the Countess. Mrs. Percival declared herself very glad that she had gone, but said she was rather disappointed in the Countess. There was more of reserve about her than she had anticipated: some persons might have fancied it hauteur, but that was not her opinion. It was shyness evidently; she did not fully comprehend English fashions, and there was something strange in her foreign accent and idiom, considering her birth. The Romish confessor had not been seen; it was understood, indeed, that he kept himself quite aloof from every one; but there was a young girl present, — a companion most probably, who talked very little, and looked melancholy; and this was all Margaret could learn.

"Your curiosity will be satisfied by and by, Margaret," said Mr. Sutherland, as he watched the slight annoyance expressed in her countenance.

"Remember there will be no one to take your place when Agatha is gone."

"I do not think that will make much difference," said Margaret: "it is foolish in me to look forward to anything like real knowledge or intimacy. There are different circles in life, and they are not meant to mingle."

"No, and if they do, one seldom sees happiness to be the result—unequal marriages for instance."

"I agree with you entirely there," said Margaret; "but I am not sure that I do about friendships and society; the difference of rank, I always fancy, must increase the charm.

"I don't pretend to know," said Mr. Sutherland. "I never had any friends except humdrum country rectors and curates, or fellows of colleges; but do you think, Margaret, that friendships, any more than human beings, can live upon pound cake?"

"You mean the romance one reads of in novels," said Margaret; "but that would not be mine."

"But any kind of romance,—don't you think it requires, besides, some less ethereal food: mutual sympathy about pet cats and dogs; and, perhaps, a little good-natured gossip, such as Miss Debrett would give?"

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Margaret, "a gossiping friendship! I could not even imagine it."

"Well, I suppose I am mistaken; but I always fancy (I dare say I have gained the notion from books) that these things are the cement which bind the friendship together. I know for myself that my best friend takes a lively interest in the welfare of Prince, and would be really disappointed if he did not know exactly how my garden flourishes."

"According to the elegant proverb, 'Love me, love my dog,'" said Margaret.

"Yes; and I don't quite see how this is to be managed where there is great disparity of rank. I don't understand how you would make the Countess Novera sympathize with your dread of one of Miss Debrett's visits, or with the difficulties you have with the children."

"How absurd you are!" exclaimed Margaret, laughing; "as if such sympathy was necessary."

"Remember, I did not say it was; I asked merely as a matter of curiosity."

"If I were to know the Countess Novera intimately," observed Margaret, "I hope we should find sufficient subjects for mutual interest, without being obliged to have recourse to either Miss Debrett or the children."

"You would discuss Tasso and Dante from morning till night at first; but that presupposes that you are always to be in the mood. Now, you know, Margaret, that even the wisest must descend to earth sometimes; and then it strikes me that you would find yourselves living, one at the north and the other at the south pole."

"Perhaps so," replied Margaret, carelessly; "but I cannot believe that that sort of thing would cause any diminution of real affection."

Mr. Sutherland smiled, and giving her a kiss, he said, "that is a very young hope, my child. Depend upon it you and I should not love each other half as happily, or as unchangeably, if you were a rich duchess whilst I was a poor vicar with three hundred and fifty pounds a year."

"I am glad you said as happily, and not as well," observed Margaret.

"I have meant happily all along. Difference of rank, I suspect, acts as a hot-bed. Affection is pre-

cocious and luxuriant, but not healthy. So I will promise to love you always, whether you marry the Great Mogul or remain Margaret Percival to the end of your days; but I do not promise always to enter into your feelings when you order your black slaves about; and I shall not expect you to enter into mine, when I go and inquire after Humphrey Jackson and his rheumatism."

"And the end of all is, that I am not to throw away my admiration upon the Countess Novera," replied Margaret.

"Not exactly; because if I were in a lecturing humour, I should give you a caution there upon more important grounds."

"Acknowledge that you are never very much disinclined to lecture," said Margaret, in a playful tone.

"No, indeed, I will not, because I am just going to spare you a discourse upon the dangers of an intimacy with a Romanist."

"But why spare me? I always listen very patiently."

"First, because I have promised Philip he shall have a ride upon Prince round the field; and next, because I see no probability of your being thrown in the way of temptation. The Countess does not intend to live at Henningsley; Mr. Prior informed me of that yesterday."

Mr. Sutherland did not perceive Margaret's face of disappointment. He went away, and she was left to think upon the disagreeable conversation. Her uncle had not meant that it should be so, but disagreeable it undoubtedly was. If she had only told him her prepossession in favour of the Countess before, he would have assumed another tone; but he discussed the matter as if it were of no con-

sequence, and his objections appeared unsatisfactory. Margaret had no doubt herself, that if the Countess were all that she had resolved she should be, a friendship with her would be a great addition to her happiness. She did not form any particular wishes, because she saw very little chance of their accomplishment; but if the opportunity offered itself, she could discover no reason whatever to draw back, merely because they were not equals in rank. The religion was a more important difference, but it did not seem insurmountable; they need not interfere with each other, and there would be no occasion to touch upon it. Margaret was vexed with her uncle, as she had been once before. She said to herself that no woman would have been so blind as not to perceive that such a light way of talking annoyed her, yet she could not think of telling him so: her reserve came in the way, and it did not seem worth while to make a remark about such a trifle. It would only worry him, she thought; and the best thing would be not to mention the Countess's name for the future. She could not be annoyed then; and when Henningsley was again left deserted, as most probably it would soon be, her own feelings were likely to die away. Margaret saw no fault in her reserve, and perhaps it would be hard to call it one; but she had misled her uncle, though unintentionally. She had lately given him the idea that she could talk to him openly upon every subject, and, till this instance, she had not failed to do it. He had no reason, therefore, to suspect any thing beyond a passing inclination to call upon a lady whose rank and beauty rendered her an object of attraction, and he had treated it accordingly. Margaret grew more reserved the more she thought upon what he had said; and she did not even ask

him why he spoke of danger in an intimacy with a Romanist, though at the moment she had rather wished to learn. She shut herself up, and was silent; and Mr. Sutherland noticed this, and supposed she was thinking of Agatha. His manner was particularly affectionate all the evening, and Margaret blamed herself for unkindness towards him; still she did not alter her own manner, nor make the least allusion to Henningsley, nor ask any more questions about the Countess. Her mother even declared that she had no curiosity, because she took so little part in the remarks which were made at intervals about the visit; and at last Margaret retired to bed, earlier than usual, very dissatisfied with herself for being cross, and resolving to forget the conversation as soon as possible.

Mr. Sutherland was to return to Alton the next morning, and not to be at the Grove again till the day preceding Agatha's wedding. Margaret had dexterously suggested Dean Clive as the most proper person to perform the ceremony; and Mrs. Percival seized upon the idea, hinted it to the Colonel, who highly approved, and made excuses to her brother for not asking him. Mr. Sutherland was full of gratitude to Margaret for her management; and in the few moments when they were together alone, he did as he had never done before. He spoke of himself, of his long attachment, and his flattering hopes, and their bitter disappointment; and when he said that he trusted he was now resigned and thankful; he also added, that within the last year he had ceased to look upon his situation as lonely; Margaret's affection had thrown a sunshine over his life. Margaret's heart painfully reproached her: she could not bear to be reserved upon a subject of no consequence, when he was so

open upon one on which the happiness of his life had rested. If it had been the moment for mentioning herself, she would have confessed her folly ; but she did not think it was, and it would be easier perhaps to write than to speak, and so they parted,— Mr. Sutherland to his parish duties, and Margaret to prepare for taking the children for a walk.

CHAPTER XIX.

Since receiving her uncle's hints upon education, Margaret had made some progress in more judicious management; and as a consequence she was much more popular. It is not strictness which children dislike, but inconsistency and caprice. There was frequently now a contest for her hand, for Margaret had learned to listen whilst Philip repeated the odd stories he had been reading; and to bear with Grace's descriptions of all the wonderful things she should buy if she were rich. One of her great temptations now was to be constantly correcting. From natural quickness she readily perceived the germs of faults, and since she had begun to watch the children from principle, her consciousness of them had become a sort of instinct. She could descry conceit in the merest intonation of Grace's voice, and the tone in which Harriet sometimes begged to be allowed to turn back because she was tired was distressing; it told so plainly of indolence. Margaret was not yet mistress of two very essential qualifications for those who would win the hearts as well as rule the actions of children. She could not see a fault without remarking upon it; and she could not give a playful reproof. It was clear that she often irritated the children, especially Harriet; but it was difficult to discover why. Complaints, she knew, she did not make without cause, but the mistake lay in making them too seriously. Margaret's was rather a Draconian code. It had the same grave look and reproachful manner for a passing

forgetfulness, as for a wilful neglect; and Harriet, who had by nature a matter-of-fact but discriminating mind, was fretted by the exaggeration, and lost a great deal of the good which she might otherwise have gained from her sister's care. But Margaret's errors in judgment and practice were open to correction merely by her own observation. She had no theories, and she was resolved as far as possible to guard her own conduct, and to act out every thing which she wished the children to do.

The idea of working for any thing beyond, it was not easy to realize. Margaret did not forget what her uncle had said upon the subject of the Church. She thought of it a good deal, but it did not seem in the least practical. As a matter of history its claims were well known to her; but every one around her seemed to have forgotten them. She daily heard Baptists, and Wesleyans, and the innumerable sects of Dissenters with which Staunton and Deering abounded, spoken of in the same terms as the Church; and she knew that half the charities of the place were carried on through their instrumentality. It did not appear right and liberal to attach herself entirely to her own communion, when others, more active and self-denying, were working good, or what seemed to be good, around her. She feared it would engender an exclusive spirit, and so she endeavoured to take an enlarged view; to look upon herself as a member, not merely of the Church of England, but of the great Christian family throughout the world. And to work for such a body, how could it be done? Where was the organisation? where were the laws? where was the controlling power? The whole was one mass of conflicting opinions, rival authorities, disputed dogmas. There was no such liberality to be found amongst Dissenters as Margaret was inclined to practise;

for each party strenuously asserted its own rights. If the points upon which they disagreed were of importance, truth must be confined to one sect alone; and how then did this differ from Mr. Sutherland's principle of the Church being the only safe rock on which to rest? If the points were not of importance, why were they not yielded? For the spread of Christianity alone, such a submission was imperatively required. Margaret could come to no satisfactory conclusion, but, as her thoughts had been hasty, she intended to consider the subject more fully when she was at leisure, and afterwards to place her difficulties before her uncle. In the mean time, having begun by a fear of exclusiveness, if she confined herself too strictly to the Church, she ended by setting aside the idea of a great Christian family, and resolving to limit her efforts principally to the members of her own. She would pray for them, plan for them, and try to believe that her whole business in life was to do them good.

There was no favourable opportunity for renewing the conversation before Mr. Sutherland went away. It required first to be well weighed, and Margaret's attention was not sufficiently disengaged for such topics. Agatha's time was given up to amusement and wedding preparations, and her few duties of writing notes and receiving visitors were therefore added to her sister's daily employments. Yet Margaret was not irritated. She knew that an appointed task was before her, apportioned not by man but God; and to please Him was in itself both motive and recompense. The question was not what she did, but how; and the zest with which she seized a few spare moments for study was a compensation for many daily annoyances. The children's walk was now rather a pleasure than not, as it took her from home at the time when she was most liable to inter-

ruption. Still it was a trial of patience when they were sent to dress themselves. Grace and Philip generally contrived to quarrel about gloves, and Harriet, three days out of the four, lost hers. Margaret was generally ready, and had called them repeatedly before either of them appeared, and by the delay a quarter of an hour was perhaps lost — a very small portion of time for some persons, but a very important one for Margaret, who was always obliged to be out with them for two hours, calculated from the moment they left the house. The time between walking and dinner was her own, and this quarter of an hour was perpetually subtracted from it by the children's carelessness and dawdling habits. She could make little use of it, for she was most frequently required to settle the disputes, or to find what was lost; and if this were not the case, her mother generally knocked three or four times at her door to bid her "go and hurry the little ones, for the beauty of the day was passing." Margaret tried to remedy the evil by allowing a certain number of minutes; but they were sure to be infringed upon, and the few punishments which she was allowed to inflict were thought nothing of. She gave lectures upon neatness, and did her utmost towards setting an example, and this was in some degree efficacious; but still the cure was not complete: for some reason or other Margaret was kept waiting every day. Her old irritability returned upon her, and the offence was considered great, and reproved accordingly. "If you grow up with these habits," she said in her gravest voice, as Harriet joined her after a delay of at least twenty minutes, partly caused by having remained in the hall to say good-bye to her uncle, instead of putting the school-room closet in order, as she had been told; "if you really do not try more to conquer

these careless, tiresome ways, you will be fit for nothing. No one will ever trust you, or depend upon you. You will be useless all your life."

"But indeed, Margaret, I made as much haste as I could. It was only because of uncle Henry, else I should have put the closet to rights directly after dinner."

"It does not signify to give reasons," replied Margaret: "it is your fault, and you must get the better of it. Every one in the house is put out by your dawdling. You know, the day before yesterday, when Agatha and Mrs. St. Aubyn were going to take you out, you kept the carriage five-and-twenty minutes."

"Only ten," said Harriet, rather angrily, "because I looked at the hall clock, and saw; and yesterday I was ready before any one."

"You have a bad habit of excusing yourself, Harriet," continued Margaret: "you know very well that I don't mean to speak of any particular instance; but it is your defect; you never can exert yourself,—you will not hurry in the least; I cannot think what you will do when you grow up to be a woman."

"I did hurry as much as I could," muttered Harriet, following her sister into the garden, where Grace and Philip were playing.

Margaret did not vent her feelings upon the two little ones, though many in her situation might have been tempted to do it. Her temper was becoming more under control every day; and finding herself annoyed by one fault, she was careful not to be captious about others. Her summons to Grace and her brother was made in a very good-humoured tone, and each seizing a hand, and declaring that Harriet had walked with Margaret only yesterday, and therefore it was their turn to-day, they set out

"Which way are we to go?" was Philip's first inquiry.

"I don't know; which way do you wish? Ashington, or the river, or Milford Hill, or the Eastlake road; which do you like best?"

"I thought we were all to go into the town, to choose a locket for our hair for Agatha," said Grace.

"No, I must do that alone by and by," replied Margaret.

Harriet had been walking by herself, with something of sullenness in her countenance. "Now, didn't you think so?" said Grace, appealing to her. "Didn't mamma tell us we might go and choose for ourselves?"

"No," answered Harriet, who was remarkable for exactness in all she asserted. "Mamma said perhaps Margaret would bring us some to choose from."

"Well, that is the same sort of thing; we are to choose."

"No, Grace," observed Margaret, "it is not the same. I wish you would learn to be as particular as Harriet in repeating things."

Harriet's face a little brightened, for she was peculiarly sensitive to praise, perhaps from the very fact of having so little of it. Margaret noticed this, and was pleased, as she had not intended to give more than a gentle reproof, and had rather wondered at Harriet's sulkiness. When it was settled that they should take the Eastlake road and return over Milford Hill, she sent the children on before, that she might have a few moments for considering what she had said. It was all very true;—dawdling was a serious fault, most tormenting to every one; but it was not quite as certain that, if Harriet were a dawdle, when she grew up she would be fit for nothing, or that no one would

ever trust her, or that she would be useless all her life. There was a degree of truth in each of the assertions, but then each was exaggerated. Neither was it the case that Harriet *never* did exert herself, that she would not hurry *in the least.* Margaret had perceived an instance of her efforts only the day before, and naturally the reproof had appeared unfair. All this Margaret saw, because she was willing to see it. Self-examination with her was no form, it was the inquiry of a lowly, sincere mind, and whatever were the errors that it brought to light she never shut her eyes to them. How to remedy her mistake was now the question. The fault must not be overlooked, because it might really be of consequence; and after having spoken of it so gravely, it would not do to treat it lightly. There was another alternative, and as they were returning home Margaret called the little girl to her, and finding that she was no longer out of humour, proposed that instead of going home she should walk with her into the town to assist in choosing the locket. "Perhaps she would know better than herself," she said, "what Grace and Philip would like, and it would not do to take them, they were so troublesome in shops."

Harriet was delighted, and even the two little ones were more satisfied, as they said that Harriet was much more likely to buy pretty things than Margaret, because Margaret never cared about brooches and lockets. They knew she had a great many, but she never put them on like Agatha.

Margaret laughed, and assured them that some day or other, just to satisfy them, she would dress herself out beautifully; and Philip, protesting he would make her do it the very day Agatha was married, ran into the house with Grace, whilst Harriet and Margaret went on into the town.

Harriet had both forgotten and forgiven, and talked without restraint, and Margaret entered into all she said, and described the sort of locket which they would be likely to get for the sum they had to spend. Or should it be a brooch? Lockets were very pretty, but brooches were more useful, and perhaps they might meet with one which it would suit Agatha to wear every day, so that she might always have something to remind her of them. Harriet's interest in the purchase increased, when she found that her sister deemed it worthy of consideration, and she did not once remember that Margaret had been harsh. Margaret, however, did, and the idea presented itself more strongly than before, that perhaps Harriet's was a disposition to be governed by kindness rather than by strict rules. At any rate there could be no harm in making the experiment on which she had determined.

"I will tell you one reason, Harriet," she said, as a pause occurred in the conversation, "why I am particularly anxious to go out soon in the afternoon; because if I don't, I have so little time to myself. It is only the hour before dinner which I can be certain of having for reading, and if we come in late I can't do any thing, and I was thinking just now that if I mentioned this you would be glad to help me by being quick; besides trying to get rid of a fault."

"I do mean to try to-morrow," replied Harriet, "and I was very sorry I vexed you; but, do you know, Margaret, I did not think at all how late it was till I heard Grace say she was ready. I was waiting for uncle Henry."

"He made us all late," said Margaret; "but he won't be here to-morrow, and then if you will see that Grace and Philip go up-stairs when dinner is over, I dare say we shall be able to manage better."

There was no acknowledgment in this, that Margaret had been in the wrong, for it would have lowered herself, and been out of place: but the turn of the sentence was conciliatory, and Harriet grew more ashamed of her provoking habits than she had been after the most severe lecture.

"You shall have a whole hour to yourself to-morrow, Margaret: just see if you don't. We will all try which can be ready first; that was what made us so quick yesterday; Grace and I had a race."

Margaret thanked her, and called her "dear child;" and Harriet stroked her sister's hand, and said she liked walking out with her of all things. Margaret lightly hinted, that if she intended to be first in the race to-morrow, the gloves must be put away carefully at night; and then, as they had reached the jeweller's, the conversation dropped. Mr. Lovell's was an extremely good shop for a country town, and rather the fashion. Mrs. St. Aubyn herself had not hesitated to patronise it, and Margaret had no doubt of soon finding what was wanted. But of all the minor difficulties of life, that of choosing a wedding present, when children are to be the donors, is one of the most difficult. Margaret turned over a very handsome assortment of brooches, lockets, and rings, and selected the few which suited the price that was to be given; but, Harriet, having been permitted to see the wonders of the glass cases on the counters, could be contented with nothing of an inferior order. She would not look at a plain gold locket, nor even a small turquoise brooch. She had set her heart upon one set with pearls and rubies, and it was with difficulty she could be persuaded that all her pocket money, and Grace and Philip's together would not purchase it. Her godmamma, she said, had sent her a sovereign about two months ago, and she would give it willingly for the pearl

and ruby brooch. The shopman smiled, and assured her, that many sovereigns would not be sufficient, and then begging Margaret to excuse him, he hurried away to attend to some new customers. Margaret was trying to persuade Harriet to be satisfied, when a woman came up to them and proposed to show them a set of trinkets which had just arrived. Some were French, remarkably elegant, and not at all expensive. Fresh drawers were placed before them, and Harriet's expressions of delight drew the attention of a lady who had last entered. She came near, and Margaret in an instant knew the melodious, but very peculiar tones, which inquired if it was much the custom in England to receive jewellery from France. The Countess Novera was standing close beside her. If she had only been in Agatha's place, she might have spoken, now they could only meet as strangers. Yet it was a great pleasure to feel, that she might listen to, and even look at her occasionally, and her thoughts were quite diverted from the wedding presents, in her dread lest the Countess should go. Margaret was not aware of her own attractions; the Countess was quite as unwilling to depart as she was to lose her, and lingered under pretence of examining some watch seals, whilst Harriet endeavoured to make a decision. "This is beautiful," and "this is extremely elegant," and "I am sure, Miss, you must think this lovely:" were phrases repeated, at least, a dozen times; but they had only the effect of bewildering Harriet's judgment, and Margaret was going to tell her that she really must choose at once, when the shopwoman opened another drawer, and taking from it several small boxes, said, as she opened one, and held up the ornament it contained:—

"What do you think of this, Miss? we have sold several."

It was a silver crucifix.

Margaret uttered an exclamation of indignant horror! "Sell them for ornaments! impossible!"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, we do. Some ladies admire them extremely; and you know crosses are quite the fashion."

Fashion! what a word to be applied to the emblem of all that is most awful and humbling in the history of redemption! Margaret closed the box, and said gravely, "I can scarcely imagine that crucifixes have ever been purchased as ornaments, though you may have sold them."

"I don't know, I am sure, ma'am," said the shopwoman, rather pertly. "Crosses are constantly. You may have seen them probably."

A sigh escaped from Margaret, and she turned away with pain and disgust. To sell crucifixes, and even crosses, merely as ornaments, was only on a par with the putting up in a window the engravings of our blessed Lord by the side of a head of Cesar, or Napoleon, or the prints of the blind fiddler, a sight which met her eye whenever she passed through Staunton. If we will play, as it were, with the few visible signs which are granted us of those tremendous truths on which our everlasting happiness depends, it can be no matter of surprise if the truths themselves become unreal; if we hear, and read, and speak of our Lord and Saviour with no more vivid consciousness of His existence, than we have of the labours of Hercules, or the lives of the Roman kings, which modern historians have pronounced to be a myth. Margaret would always have thought that irreverence was displayed in a crucifix: merely as a matter of taste, it would have been offensive to her: but the feeling was

now much deeper. She immediately began to hurry Harriet, and insisted upon setting aside the trinkets, which alone could be chosen, being at the moment only desirous of ridding herself of the forward shopwoman. Before this was done Mrs. Percival unexpectedly came in. She said but a few words, though sufficient to show their relationship, when Margaret contrived to make her aware of the presence of the Countess, who had retired to a little distance. Mrs. Percival did not suppose it likely that she should be remembered, having been only one amongst a crowd of visitors. To her surprise, however, the Countess came forward, as soon as she perceived her, and entered into conversation. Margaret stood by, longing to be introduced, and wondering what the exact rule of etiquette would be. The Countess made some remarks upon the town, and its neatness and convenience; but her eye wandered constantly to Margaret; and at length, when the few desultory subjects were exhausted, and parting civilities might naturally have been expected, she said almost abruptly: —

"I think I can scarcely be mistaken. I have had the pleasure of seeing one of your daughters; may I be allowed to form the acquaintance of another?"

Margaret's deep blush spoke of pleasure and shyness, and perhaps a little shame for having been already in fancy so intimate with a stranger. The Countess delicately covered her embarrassment by continuing to address her without requiring an answer; and in a few moments Margaret was at ease, and entering readily into the smooth and graceful flow of the Countess's conversation. Mrs. Percival naturally felt gratified; but neither rank, nor beauty, nor even eloquence, could induce her to forget that she had business to attend to, and after a little

while she desired Margaret not to keep Harriet out too long, and departed.

"You are in a hurry, I fear," said the Countess, when she noticed that Margaret laid her hand upon the parcel, apparently intending to follow. "Is your sister an invalid?"

Margaret could not refrain from a smile, as she thought how little the Countess would be likely to understand the way in which every one at the Grove was kept under rule, and merely answered in the negative, adding, that "she could not say she was in a hurry, for the walk home was a short one."

"I passed your house, I think," said the Countess," as I came from Henningsley. "It stands back from the road on the right hand side, does it not?"

"Yes, about three quarters of a mile it is reckoned to be from the town."

"Then you are not more than half a mile from the lodge-gate at Henningsley. I had no idea we were such near neighbours; for in a new country it is not easy to calculate distances."

Margaret merely replied that there was no house nearer to the Grove in that direction, and then again took up her parcel, intending to go.

The Countess went to the door of the shop, and remarked that it looked very threatening; she was afraid Miss Percival might have an unpleasant walk home if the storm came on. Her carriage would call for her in a few minutes; might she be permitted to offer a seat in it?

Margaret did not consider the probabilities or non-probabilities of a storm; the offer was quite a sufficient inducement, and with evident pleasure and thanks it was accepted.

The Countess was satisfied; and although the

carriage was delayed longer than she expected, seemed contented to remain in the inner part of the shop, where they could be free from observation, and did not once express either wonder or impatience.

Margaret could not help perceiving that there was something more than common courtesy in the attention paid her, but she could not account for it; she was too simple-minded to imagine that her personal attractions, either of appearance or manner, could be the cause; and at length, with her usual rapidity, came to the conclusion, that in some way or other such cordiality from a stranger must be owing to Mrs. St. Aubyn. There was no pause in the conversation until the arrival of the carriage. Margaret was led on she knew not how; but the Countess spoke of Italy, its scenery, and historical associations, and Margaret's imagination was wrought upon, until she found herself expressing freely, sentiments and feelings, upon which, even with her uncle, she might have had some reserve. The Countess was evidently enthusiastic, and highly educated; and no more fruitful source of mutual interest could be found than the country she loved so well; and Margaret entered warmly into the subjects brought forward, without the most distant idea of making a display of her acquirements; in fact, they were so common that she never thought about them, except to lament that they were superficial. The Countess, however, did not fully understand the degree of refinement and cultivation now generally attained by English girls; and it was a source of as much surprise as pleasure to find that she could mention Petrarch and Tasso, and even indulge herself by speaking the language which had become more familiar than her native tongue, and yet be understood. She had hoped to

find unity of faith upon religious subjects, as she had still little doubt that her new acquaintance was a Romanist; but she had not ventured to look forward to any thing like the congeniality of taste, which, notwithstanding Margaret's diffidence, could not be concealed.

"It is such a pleasure," she said, in reply to an observation upon the beauties and peculiarities of some of the modern Italian novels, "to meet with any one who will discuss these things 'con amore.' Every one talks to me about them, as a matter of course; but I see directly that it is of course, and then I do not care for it."

"Yet the language is generally read now," replied Margaret; "and I should have supposed that persons who can appreciate English poetry would in the same way enter into Italian."

"Do you ever find any one talk to you willingly about it?" enquired the Countess.

"Seldom; but then I consider it my own fault. I do not know enough to bring the subject forward, or to pursue it if it is begun."

"Nay, that can scarcely be," said the Countess, laughing, "considering all the knowledge you have been betraying."

Margaret coloured, and said that she had no idea of betraying knowledge; she had spoken only as she felt, and it was perfectly true that her acquaintance with Italian was very limited. She had principally taught herself, and though she could understand, she had considerable difficulty in speaking it. The Countess's reply was made in Italian; and gracefully, yet with a smile and intonation which removed every idea of striving after effect, she expressed her hope that whilst she remained at Henningsley, they might meet so often as mutually to benefit each other. "My foreign idiom," she

added, "is sometimes sorely perplexing to my English attendants and the tradespeople; but I am endeavouring to improve by teaching a young friend who is with me, and whom I shall hope soon to have the pleasure of introducing to you."

Margaret could have answered readily in her own tongue, but the Italian failed her completely; and as she was hesitating and laughing at her difficulty, the carriage drove up. Harriet alone was glad to see it, for after the amusement in watching a stranger was over, she grew tired of waiting; especially since she could no longer look at the ornaments with any hope of purchasing them. The Countess apologised for her servant's neglect, but gave no orders for any extra haste; and Margaret secretly wished that three miles instead of three quarters of a mile, had been the length of the proposed drive. Harriet carefully kept possession of the trinket box, for she saw that Margaret had forgotten it; but the Countess noticed it, and seizing upon the opportunity to allude to the one subject on which she supposed they had a common interest, said: "You were shocked just now at that woman's irreverence; yet living in this country, I should have imagined you were accustomed to it."

"I — I beg your pardon; — yes, I was shocked certainly; every one must have been," replied Margaret, with great hesitation, for she could not understand what seemed the awkwardness of such a speech.

"I mean it is the usual tone with Protestants," continued the Countess. "Things which we deem sacred, and use in our churches and oratories, and for aids to private devotion, they either discard altogether, or turn into ornaments."

Margaret was still more puzzled. "I do not think that Protestants possessed of right feeling do

so," she answered; "careless minds must be the same every where."

"But it is almost unavoidable; it is the defect of their faith; its peculiar mark. They are so spiritual that they cannot attach sanctity to any thing visible."

"Indeed! I think you are mistaken; I am sure you would find it otherwise," continued Margaret, becoming really distressed.

"Ah! that is because you have lived amongst them so long. You cannot see with the eyes of those who come from the very source and spring-head of our most holy faith. You would speak differently if you had witnessed the gorgeousness of southern worship. The Catholic religion in England is mutilated."

"But," said Margaret, in a tone the firmness of which showed that she was not speaking naturally, "I do not think the gorgeousness of any worship would have attractions for me. I am a Protestant."

The Countess bent forward suddenly, and her complexion varied from its clear delicate colour to one of extreme paleness; and then as the blood again rushed to her face, until it dyed her forehead, she said, in a low voice, "You must pardon me, I have been under great error. I thought we both professed the one true ——." She stopped and added more quickly, "Surely we met before in the church of St. Ouen?"

Poor Margaret saw directly the secret of the Countess's attention; she was valued not for herself, but for the Church to which she was supposed to belong. The disappointment was greater than she could conceal, and the Countess construed it into annoyance. "I am so grieved, so extremely pained," she said. "Nay, excuse me" (the carriage had reached the Grove, and they were about to enter

the gates), you must let me carry you on a little farther."

Margaret made no objection, and recovering herself, hastened to assure the Countess that no pardon was needed. The mistake was natural, and she could only regret that it should give her a moment's pain.

"Yet I ought to have imagined—and my words, they were so thoughtless,"—began the Countess. And after a little consideration she added, "But surely you were at St. Ouen?"

"Yes," replied Margaret; "and I felt there what it seems to me every one instinctively would feel in such a place."

"My prejudices must seem to you quite uncharitable," said the Countess; "but have you never been in Italy?"

"I have never even been on the Continent, except for that one short week."

"Then you cannot have remarked the irreverence, the sneers, of the visitors." "The English," Beatrice was going to add, but she corrected herself, and again slightly colouring, said that she had been so persuaded Margaret was not a Protestant that she could not in a moment divest herself of the idea.

"Protestant is a name held in little estimation by you, I fear," said Margaret, feeling shame for the conduct which she knew must have given rise to the odium.

"Not Protestantism which can appreciate and worship in St. Ouen," replied the Countess, with a smile of peculiar sweetness.

"Yet you must think us in great error?"

"Yes, of course, I must; but piety under whatever form is worthy of honour."

"And you do not deny the possibility of its existence amongst us?" inquired Margaret.

"No, no; I must indeed have given a false impression, if you could for one moment think it."

Margaret was sorry that she had spoken, for she saw that the Countess was pained.

"Do not think hardly of me," continued Beatrice; "if, that is, you can really forgive; and let me hope that we may meet frequently."

She held out her hand, and Margaret, even more gratified than before, received her advances in a way which gave full proof that the apology had been taken as it was meant. The Countess insisted upon alighting at her own lodge, and sending back Margaret and Harriet in the carriage; and when they had driven off she walked slowly and thoughtfully towards the house.

CHAPTER XX.

When the Countess Novera retraced the conversation between herself and Margaret, she was conscious of having been carried by impulse much farther than reason would have led her.

The mere prepossession in favour of a stranger, gathered from a transitory meeting, or even the idea that they were united in belief upon religious subjects, ought not in prudence to have resulted in such an evident desire to cultivate an intimacy, as she had during their short interview been induced to show.

Yet Beatrice could not bring herself to regret what had taken place. Even though her hopes of sympathy upon the most important point were destroyed, she still felt that a charm remained. Margaret was unlike any one she had yet seen. The Countess's knowledge of English girls was principally confined to those whom she had met upon the Continent, and to the many to whom she had been introduced, but with whom she had never become intimate in London. She had admired many for their beauty, and had learnt to think highly of their refinement and amiability; but in Margaret there was something which to her was more fascinating. All her remarks showed a freshness and simplicity which, when joined to the talents so unconsciously displayed, awoke an interest such as Beatrice had not imagined it possible that one whom she deemed a heretic could inspire. But although she could

not regret the cordiality which had been shown, the Countess did not fail to reproach herself. Father Andrea had feared that she might care too much for her English friends; and if this could not be the case here (since she could not be supposed to care for Margaret), still it was true that she looked forward to seeing her again with a pleasure which ought scarcely to be associated with a person beyond the pale of the Church, and till that day a perfect stranger. Could it be that her zeal for the cause which had once been so dear to her was diminishing? A susceptible conscience made her dread lest it should be so. Certainly she had received much kindness in England, and though she could not find happiness in it, she could never look upon it with cold indifference, as she had done before. With the candour which her pride could never destroy, Beatrice went instantly to Father Andrea. He was in his study, reading. A heap of letters and half-written papers lay beside him, for his correspondence was large; and since he came to England his advice and support had been required by many of the most influential members of his communion. Beatrice excused herself for interrupting him, but Father Andrea's face was a sufficient assurance that the excuse was not required. The one vulnerable point in his otherwise stern character was his affection for her. He removed his books, and placing a chair for her, smiled as she regretted the inconvenience to which he was subjected, and entreated that he would allow her to provide him a larger apartment.

"It is ample for my needs, my daughter," he said. "Even if it were a prisoner's cell, it would be more than my deserts; and they who are pilgrims upon earth, should take little count of the hostelries in which for the time they dwell. But

you are vexing yourself without cause. I have all that I want, or could even find it in my heart to wish for."

"So you have said always, father," replied the Countess, "yet it is natural that I should desire your comfort; and you deny me a pleasure when you will not attend to it."

"The chief comfort I require is always at my command," replied the confessor, "and for earthly blessings, I have the privilege of watching over your happiness, my daughter, and studying for the advancement of our holy Church."

"Oh, that I could be like you, father!" exclaimed the Countess, "never to forget, and turn aside. But that great weakness which I have mourned over so often — it will never leave me. It is the mood of the moment which governs me now, as it did when first I knelt before you to confess my childish faults."

"And is the mood of the moment a wrong one now?" enquired the confessor.

"You would think it so," she replied, "because you can never be led away by any charm of manner to overlook a vital difference of principle. But, father, it is only self-distrust which makes me speak thus. I have met the English girl whom I first saw kneeling at St. Ouen. She is not one of us, as I imagined. She is a heretic. Yet I cannot think of her as such; I am still attracted by her, and I would fain see her again. Can it be lukewarmness which is the cause?"

"Kneeling in the church of St. Ouen?" repeated the father, thoughtfully. "Did you say you had spoken to her?"

"Yes, we have spent some time in conversation. She is not like others whom I have seen; she is full of poetry, and enthusiasm, and devotion. Her

mind is not fitted for the chilling creed of a Protestant."

"And you are likely to know more of her?" inquired Father Andrea, with the same abstracted air.

"Yes, if there be no evil in my own heart to prevent it. I can scarcely avoid it, indeed; for I made advances under the belief that she was a Catholic, and unintentionally said things which were painful to her; and as I apologized warmly, I must seem capricious unless I act up to my words. Her family, too, have called, so that we must keep up some acquaintance."

Father Andrea laid down his pen, and sat thoughtfully for a few moments.

"If you must be intimate," he said, "why should I be consulted?"

"Oh, Father, but you know that I could not be so without your sanction. I would risk any thing rather than encourage what you disapprove."

"My full sanction cannot be given suddenly, my daughter. Yet if there were no taint of infirmity about us, we might mix with heretics, and be the means of their salvation without endangering our own."

"I am infirm, I know," said the Countess, in a tone of meekness which was natural to her only when religion was the topic of conversation; "but, Father, I would die; yes,"—and the meekness passed away, and the intensity of devotion was heard in its stead,—"God is my witness, I would die for our Holy Church!"

"Heaven bless you, my daughter!" replied Father Andrea, fervently. "Follow your own will; watch yourself carefully; neglect no single duty, either of prayer, or penance, or fasting, and let the intimacy

of which you have spoken be guided by circumstances."

Beatrice rose, and as she was leaving the room she said —

"You will remember Lucia, Father: her present temper must be utterly destructive of my comfort; and you alone have power over her."

Father Andrea promised that he would talk to her in the course of the day; but when Beatrice departed, he had no thought to bestow upon any subject but the permission which he had just given for an intercourse, which it was clear that the Countess herself had considered open to objection. Father Andrea reasoned long with himself, and scrutinised carefully the dangers which might arise. Yet his decision was still the same. A character such as the Countess had described was, he believed, far more likely to be induced to look favourably upon the Romish Church, by the attraction of the Countess's society, than to exercise any permanent influence in the opposite direction. There had been indeed once a passing fear in his mind, lest Beatrice should, in England, be drawn to the religion of her relations. It was the fear he had expressed before Lucia, and which had finally determined her upon accompanying the Countess; but since his stay in London this fear had vanished. Beatrice had never expressed the least sympathy, or even curiosity, upon the subject. Many things indeed had seemed repugnant to her. The closed churches, the unsightly monuments of St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey, and the demands for payment where abroad all would have been open. She found fault, too, with the inconsistency which could insist so strongly upon the observance of the day of rest, and yet keep open the opera-house to the latest hour on a Saturday night, and spend the afternoon of the

Sunday in driving in the parks. They were glaring defects, which openly met her eye, and put a stop to any wish to inquire further. Neither was there any fear that the external circumstances of religion would make an impression upon her at Henningsley. Father Andrea, even before he came there, was well acquainted with the state of the parish of Deering. The Countess, so soon affected by all that appealed to the eye, would only be disgusted by the neglected churchyard, and perhaps moved to ridicule by the unsightly building. If she went amongst her tenants, she would hear little or nothing of the labours of the clergyman. He would be spoken of as a good-natured, well-meaning, indolent man; but Beatrice would know that these were not the qualities for which alone a minister of Christ ought to be distinguished. She would require zeal and devotedness; and at Deering they were not to be found. With such a low standard in the clergyman, it was not likely that there should be any thing very superior in his flock. Father Andrea was aware that the imagination of the Countess was easily captivated by an accordance in taste; and to this he attributed her sudden prepossession. It could do her no harm, he thought; it might even amuse and render her happy, whilst business detained her in the country: and it would serve to relieve the burdensome weight of Lucia's ill-humour. Perhaps, indeed, it might excite jealousy, but the case could scarcely be worse than it already was; and there was one consideration which made any risk of individual happiness of very slight importance.

Father Andrea did not often indulge in visions, but he had come to England in the belief that the general state of religious feeling was opening the way for the restoration of the Romish faith. The

present might be an opportunity for the furtherance of this object: and to be the instrument of bringing within the fold of the Church one whom he deemed a lost sheep, was a hope so animating, that, casting away his papers, he paced his little study; and, with brows bent in thought, pictured to himself the progress of events in the succeeding months, until the moment when Margaret Percival, and, it might be, others with her, should be convinced of the errors of their creed, and be received as humble and believing converts into the bosom of the Romish Church.

CHAPTER XXI.

How strange is it, even to our blinded eyes, to watch the successive steps by which events desired, but believed to be improbable, are frequently brought to pass! Margaret could not be insensible to the fact that an opening was now offered, though from a cause which she herself could never have supposed possible, by which the acquaintance she had so coveted was placed within her reach. The kindness of the Countess's manner at parting she attributed solely to a wish to atone for an apparent rudeness; but, from whatever motive it arose, its effect would probably be to put her at her ease, and perhaps even to afford her occasions of intimacy which otherwise would not have been in her power. Margaret felt only delight at the prospect, forgetting her uncle's caution as to the difference of rank, and being captivated by the Countess's grace and loveliness, the simplicity mingled with enthusiasm of her conversation, and the sincerity and earnestness which had been so evident when they had approached the subject of religion. Margaret realized too little the claims of her Church to resent deeply observations which she knew to be well founded; and she was rather drawn towards the Countess than the contrary, from the circumstance of her being a Romanist. She had never known one before, and there was a romance connected with the wonderful power, and splendid ceremonial, of the Romish Church, which attracted her imagination, so as to leave little room for the exercise of

judgment. But Margaret kept all her feelings carefully hidden. They would have found little congenial to them in the spirit which now pervaded her home. Each day brought its appointed important business for every one. Mrs. Percival at least said so. She would allow none to be idle. Something was always to be done, or to be ordered to be left undone: even the children, in the intervals of school hours, were occupied by messages and counter messages. Agatha's wedding dresses were ordered from Paris and London; but there were the unnumbered *et ceteras* of a bridal *trousseau*, requiring a perfect taste and a vigilant eye, besides the discussions as to the guests to be invited to the breakfast, and the preparations for a dance in the evening. The general remark about weddings is that they are very dull; but Mrs. Percival was resolved this should not be said of Agatha's, and when her husband hinted a little attention to economy, he was silenced by the reproof: "really, my dear Dr. Percival, I don't understand you,—this is quite a new trait in your character! When your daughter is going to marry a man of fortune like Colonel Clive, to object to an entertainment on her wedding day! what would the world think if it were to be known?"

"That I was a very sensible man, and fond of quiet," murmured Dr. Percival; but it was not the day for murmurs: "the world" won the victory, and the invitations were sent. Margaret's taste went against this, as against very many other of the great preparations; and she wondered that her mother did not agree with her. Mrs. Percival was not in general a woman of pretension, and for another person she would have decided at once, that the style in which the lady had been accustomed to live, and not the wealth of the gentleman whom she was to

marry, should regulate the entertainments; but we cannot always keep a check upon the betrayal of our secret principles, and in the bustle of so grand an event, Mrs. Percival displayed much which in more sober moments she would have been the first to conceal. The dance was to be; and besides, a large breakfast; to which were to be asked all Colonel Clive's relations, all Agatha's who were within any convenient distance, and as many intimate friends of both as would be offended at being omitted. The accommodation of so many in a house of moderate dimensions like the Grove would have puzzled less experienced heads; but upon all such questions Mrs. Percival was in her element. She knew exactly how to place tables lengthways and across, how to arrange for the servants to be stationed at proper intervals to avoid confusion: she had a closed door opened, in order to afford a quicker communication between the offices and the dining room, for that one day alone; and especially, she had prepared a list of under waiters, charwomen, and carpenter's men out of employ, who, for a mere trifle, were to assist in disposing of the remains of the breakfast, and to put every thing in order for the evening. These were the real difficulties; the breakfast itself required only to be ordered and it was sure to be ready in proper time. Mrs. Percival's servants were too well trained to be wanting on such an occasion; and the spirit of the mistress of the house had so pervaded the whole establishment that no complaint was heard. For Miss Percival's wedding it was made a point of honour that all should exert themselves to the utmost. Margaret looked on in silence, and much thought. Agatha was now more separated from her than ever, yet Margaret could occasionally read in her wandering eye and flushed cheek the signs of a spirit but ill at ease. But it was occasionally only.

None who heard Agatha Percival's clear laugh, or listened to the rich tones of her voice when she sang for the amusement of her friends, or joined with life and eagerness in the light topics of conversation, could have suspected that, beneath that smooth surface of easy gaiety, there lay concealed a gnawing regret and self-reproach,—kept under, indeed, by a strong hand, and most frequently lulled to repose by the flatteries which surrounded her, yet awakening at times to warn her of its existence, and to whisper to her of those future years of married life upon which she was about to enter, when the delusions of the present hour would be past away, and nothing would remain to drive from her the conviction that she had sacrificed every better feeling of her heart upon the altar of Mammon. Agatha was not happy, and she knew that her sister saw it. Margaret's had been the one voice which alone had blamed her conduct, and Margaret's was now the only countenance which did not smile with hope upon her prospects. Silence was a reproach whenever they met, and yet silence was the only refuge. What could have been said which would not have been either offensive to the one, or against the conscience of the other? As the wedding day approached, Margaret softened. — She had been angry with Agatha when it seemed possible to retract, but every day made this a more difficult step; and when Margaret once began to imagine that her sister repented of her hastiness, and would fain put an end to the engagement, resentment was changed into pity. The idea, though, was as yet only the creation of her own mind. Agatha had said nothing to give the least hint of it, and Margaret only judged by the downcast look, and the change of voice, noticed by herself alone, whenever Colonel Clive appeared, and which were followed almost immediately by

bursts of gaiety. Something, too, she suspected from the way in which Agatha received the Colonel's valuable presents. Her manner was almost repulsive for the first few moments, and afterwards there was no expression of satisfaction at the tokens of affection, but rather an undue admiration of the gifts themselves, whilst she seldom listened to any praises of his kindness, without turning attention to some other subject. And there was no bashfulness in this; Agatha's impassiveness was to the common eye .what it had ever been. She spoke of her marriage quietly as a matter of business; talked over the necessary settlements with her father; and the arrangements of her household with her mother, in as undisturbed a tone as if she were acting for another person; only when affection was alluded to, she seemed to shrink from the mention of it. Margaret blamed herself that such a state of feeling should exist between them, as to render Agatha unapproachable. But there was a proud determination in her sister's character which would have made any interference probably fatal. The mere hint that she had been in error might induce Agatha to persist in it. Margaret could say nothing; but she exerted herself to the best of her ability to win her sister's confidence by kindness. All Agatha's wishes were attended to, and all her wants provided for. Margaret was ever ready to give an opinion, or deliver a message, or prevent her from seeing persons whom she disliked. She shielded her from Mrs. Percival's scrutiny, and maternal lectures upon housekeeping. She wrote notes for the characters of her servants, and even undertook to make personal inquiries concerning them. Every thing that right principle could suggest was done, with the faint hope, in Margaret's mind, that even at the very last moment Agatha might confess her mistake,

and afford her an opportunity of entreating her to break off the engagement. Agatha's strength of mind would, she thought, support her through the ordeal which must follow upon such a step. Painful and humiliating it must of necessity be; exposing her to the observation, and even censure and ridicule, of the world; yet better, ten thousand times better any shame to herself, or even suffering to Colonel Clive, than the sin, it could not be called less, of vowing in the sight of God a love which she did not and could not expect to feel. But Margaret miscalculated, as she now frequently did when reasoning upon the movements of a worldly disposition, and judging them by her own. Strength of mind we see every day: the ambitious, the covetous, the selfish, the miserly evince it. It is often wonderful, almost to a miracle; for they toil and suffer, "they rise early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness:" they seem born to endurance and exertion; but it is the strength of an evil nature, the strength by which Satan rebelled against God. For the world they will fight, and for the world they will conquer; but let them once be required to exercise that same power against it, and they are helpless. Agatha Percival could risk — could almost certainly give up — the happiness of her life, to excite the envy and applause of her fellow-beings; but their scorn could not be endured for a single day. Margaret saw no prospect of attaining her end, and when the day preceding the wedding arrived, she resolved not to think of it. Yet there were several trifling incidents to convince her of the truth which she strove to forget, that Agatha was rushing wilfully into misery, and that the misery had already begun. These symptoms were either not remarked by the family, or considered perfectly natural. Mrs. Percival said she had cried very much at her wedding,

and no one could wonder if Agatha looked grave at the prospect of hers. The children knew that their sister was going from them to another home, and they supposed it a necessary consequence that she should wish to give them some parting remembrances, though she could not bring herself to write her name, as they said, for the last time; and the sudden tremor with which she was seized, when Colonel Clive, in the evening, alluded rather suddenly, and at a *mal-à-propos* moment, to the event of the following day, was attributed to over exertion. Margaret read it differently. It was mental, not physical, distress. — She followed her sister out of the room, though Agatha motioned her away.

"I must come, Agatha, dearest: it would be cruel to deny me to-night."

Agatha left the door of her chamber open, and casting herself upon her bed burst into tears. Margaret kissed her tenderly; but no question was asked, and no answer was required. Both knew what the other would have said. Agatha was the first to rouse herself: she sat upright, and said with a ghastly smile, "I am not ill; tell them so, Margaret, and leave me now."

"Not ill in body," replied Margaret, with a desperate resolution to discover, at all hazards, her sister's true state; "but you are ill in mind."

There was a hollow laugh which fell discordantly upon Margaret's ear.

"You cannot possibly understand it, Margaret."

"Heaven forbid I ever should," said Margaret, solemnly.

"Then why trouble yourself?" pray leave me. Mamma will be anxious."

"And not Colonel Clive?" said Margaret, whilst she looked steadfastly at her sister.

Agatha turned aside her head, and answered,

"Yes, Colonel Clive too. Say to him I am better: perhaps I may come down again."

Agatha gently put her sister's hand away, and was going to rise.

"Oh! Agatha, if you love me, do not deceive me," exclaimed Margaret, her impatience becoming more and more painful.

"Deceive you? No. What are you speaking of? I am very well, and if you will go down, I shall follow you almost directly."

Margaret knew the source from which this sudden calmness originated, and her last hope died within her. The ice was once more gathering around Agatha's heart, and to reach it would soon be impossible. Yet if she did not then make the endeavour, self-reproach for years might be upon her conscience.

"Dear Agatha," she said, "you know I have never spoken my real mind since that wretched evening at Rouen, when you said you had decided for your own happiness. I know I ought not to interfere. Things are altered now. Misery is before you; — I am convinced that you feel it."

Margaret's words were uttered abruptly, but the tone of real affection could not be misunderstood. Agatha sank back upon the pillow, and her eyes closed. They were dimmed with tears when she again opened them, but in those few moments the strength of mind on which Margaret had calculated was summoned to the support of her natural pride.

"It is not too late," continued Margaret; "only say the word; — leave it to me, and I will bear, and do every thing. And it is right: think of to-morrow and the vow."

Agatha slightly shuddered.

"The fearful vow if it is not sincere; to bind you for your whole life! Agatha, in pity to your-

self and to Colonel Clive, confess you have done wrong."

"Impossible! impossible!" exclaimed Agatha, impatiently; and she stood up and took the bell-rope in her hand, to summon her maid, in order, as she said, to have her dress re-arranged. Margaret stopped her saying,

"I must force you to listen to me."

Agatha leant against the wall, and waited quietly.

"There is hope to night," pursued Margaret; "at this time to-morrow there will be none. You will see then what you have done; or if it is not so dreadful at first, it must come to you afterwards. When you are once used to all the riches and flatteries, you will hate yourself, and loathe your husband; and his love will go from you, because he will see that you do not return it; and there will be a long life before you to be spent without affection and without self-respect."

"And if I draw back," interrupted Agatha in a proud tone.

"Oh! Agatha, if you would not speak so," exclaimed Margaret mournfully; "I know there is nothing to be said when you have that manner."

"No, dear Margaret, indeed there is not."

Agatha's voice had seldom been so emphatic, and Margaret despaired.

"You are under a mistake," continued Agatha; "I must judge for myself."

"But Agatha, answer me one question, only one. If it could be done honourably, without exciting observation?"

"What! has Colonel Clive said any thing?" enquired Agatha, with eagerness.

"No, no; of course not. But do you wish it? Would you retract if you could?"

The veins in Agatha's forehead worked quickly, and an ashy hue was on her cheek. A pause followed, and then slowly and distinctly, came the words:—

"No. I would not."

Margaret stood for an instant motionless in the centre of the room. Agatha again went to the bell, and this time no hand was stretched out to stop her.

"May you never live to repent your words, dear, dear Agatha;" was all that Margaret could say.

She had reached the door when Agatha followed her.

"Kiss me once more, Margaret; no one loves me so well!"

Margaret's arm was thrown round her sister's neck; but when she looked at Agatha with an appealing glance, which prayed that she would recall her decision, the chill impenetrability triumphed over the momentary weakness. The door was opened, Margaret went down stairs, and the bolt within the chamber was drawn. Agatha forbade admittance even to the maid whom she had summoned; and after sending a message of excuse to Colonel Clive, set herself, with an energy worthy of a better cause, to subdue the rebellious feelings which were on the point of destroying her fabric of worldly grandeur.

Many times afterwards, as Margaret recalled what she had said on that evening, she blamed herself for coldness, awkwardness and want of tact; and certainly, if the wisdom of our efforts is to be judged by their results, hers had been ill advised. But it is useless to calculate beforehand what we shall or shall not say under certain circumstances. Words fail us when we would be most impressive; or, from our ignorance of the mind with which we have to deal, we strike upon some unknown chord,

and produce just the contrary effect to that which we had intended. We can but act upon a general principle, and guard against wilful indiscretion; and when this is done, we must commit our cause in faith to the guidance of a higher power. It would have been difficult to tell what arguments would have been most likely to touch Agatha's heart. None, perhaps, but those which would have convinced her that she would gain more respect if she drew back than if she went on. And even then there would still have remained the temptation to sacrifice inward happiness for the sake of outward splendour.

It was with this that Agatha now strengthened herself to meet the morrow's trial. She looked at her dresses and her ornaments; she pictured the beauty of Ashington, she imagined herself acting as its mistress. These were attractions which every one could appreciate; and as for her peace of mind, Agatha believed that she knew herself better than Margaret. The pain she was enduring could not, she thought, last. Repugnance would melt into indifference, and when this was attained, she would have the full enjoyment of her wishes. To sacrifice all, at the last moment, merely because she was too weak to conquer a distaste, however great, would be worse than folly. Agatha reasoned correctly. If but another object had been placed before her, no higher wisdom could be found than that which would induce her to sacrifice the comfort of the present for the lasting blessings of the future. Alas! for the miserable perversion of the highest faculty of our nature, which can thus argue for our destruction, while it is utterly powerless for our salvation!

A bridal morning! It has been the theme of poets, and the termination of the labours of novel-

ists. Every one knows that it is full of bustle and fatigue, and ushered in, if not by open grief, at least by many secret sighs. Yet every one persists in assisting the general deception. A mother's tears must not be mentioned, and a sister's heavy heart must of necessity be forgotten. A wedding is not a selfish thing, for all private suffering is merged in the happiness of the two individuals, who are at length supposed to have attained the summit of earthly happiness.

Margaret felt that her contribution to the gaiety demanded by custom need not be a very large one. Never could there have been a marriage productive outwardly of less family distress. It was wonderful to persons experienced in such days of trial to witness the general hilarity. Earliest, and happiest, and proudest of all, was Mrs. Percival: ordering, arranging, enquiring, repeating directions again and again, sending for Margaret, and offering to help Agatha. If the weight of the world had been upon her shoulders she would, on that morning, have appeared able to endure it easily. Her only regrets were that Craven had not been able to obtain leave of absence, and that George could not be summoned from Eton; but these two facts had been known long enough to destroy any deep disappointment. There was sunshine to add to the pervading exhilaration; a bright, cloudless sunshine, heralding, as Miss Debrett, with a sudden poetical inspiration, remarked to Margaret, when they met before going to church, long years of happiness to the young couple. Margaret had been practising cheerfulness ever since she awoke at five o'clock in the morning, and a smile came as a matter of course.

"But, my dear, we are late, aren't we?" added Miss Debrett. "Nine o'clock, I declare; and the

Colonel to be here at half-past. Do just let me go and see if I can't help Agatha."

"Thank you; no, indeed, you must not," said Margaret, stopping her.

"Well, perhaps it is better not; she's nervous, I dare say; but do make me of use; I came early on purpose. Can I get the favours ready?"

"No, you are very kind; but there really is nothing to do. Mamma has provided every thing."

"No doubt; never was any one like her. My dear Margaret, I hope Agatha may only be half as happy in married life as she is."

Margaret tried to obtain a release, for Miss Debrett's hopes always contrived to centre on the very points which were least likely to be attained.

"And have you seen Agatha yet, my dear? how does she look?"

"I went to her door," replied Margaret, "but it was fastened. She does not like to have any one with her except Baker."

"So much the better. We shall only be the more struck presently. Do you know, I hear the Colonel boasts he shall have the most beautiful wife in England."

Margaret's uncivil thoughts were not expressed. She remembered happily that the children were not quite ready. Harriet and Grace were to be amongst the four bridesmaids. Margaret, and one of Agatha's intimate acquaintances — friends she had none — were to be the others. Miss Debrett, left solitary, occupied herself in placing chairs, and smoothing cushions, and arranging ornaments. The guests were to meet in the drawing-room, and they were expected every instant. Mrs. Percival looked into the room occasionally to see whether any one was come, and to report progress.

"Agatha was nearly ready," she said, "and so

happy; quiet, perfectly quiet, but that was like her good sense: she had just been in to her."

Mrs. Percival was gone before she was answered; and then again her head appeared.

"Would Miss Debrett tell Margaret to tell Symonds to count the chairs in the dining-room?"

And again. "Symonds had better tell Downing to bring the carriage five minutes earlier than the time mentioned." Once more. "Had Miss Debrett seen Mr. Sutherland?"

Miss Debrett had not; but Margaret had. She remarked him walking in the garden, and ran down, forgetful of the risk of soiling her delicate dress, to take one turn with him, and say what she was not able to say when he arrived late the evening before, that his presence was the only comfort she could look to during the day.

"I may be sad to you," she added, "and it is a relief, — oh, so great!"

"We must look at things hopefully even now," replied Mr. Sutherland. "Our errors are punished, and Agatha's, as far as we can judge, must and will be; but then comes the working out of good from the real evil."

"And at what a fearful cost!"

"Yes; there are some faults which must be almost burnt out — vanity and worldliness. Scarcely anything else seems to reach them."

"You are no comforter," exclaimed Margaret sorrowfully, and a tear stood in her eye.

"Forgive me," said Mr. Sutherland; "I believe it was wrong in me; at any rate, it was not what you required. But, Margaret, I will tell you something, not pleasanter, but more likely to rouse you to exertion and endurance, and so to do you good, than my hard-hearted hopes. Every prospect of happiness

for Agatha, and for your whole family, depends now, as far as we are permitted to see, upon you."

"Strange consolation for a wedding morning."

"Yes; but think of it. Many minds are crushed by responsibility; but yours will not be."

There are some observations dropt in the course of casual conversation which we feel at the moment will leave an impression uneffaced and uneffaceable upon the whole of our subsequent life. Mr. Sutherland's remark was of this nature. It gave Margaret, as he had expected it would, a sense of dignity, and strengthened her to bear whatever might be before her.

She hastened to her sister's room; Agatha was drest, and looking lovely, almost faultlessly beautiful. Baker, standing by her, was arranging the veil, which hung in transparent folds over her soft glossy hair and simple white dress, the only ornament of which was the pearl brooch that fastened a small sprig of orange flowers. Margaret's glance of eager admiration was a relief to Agatha's mind.

"If I might have helped you, dearest," said Margaret, "I should have been so glad. I hoped I might."

"Thank you, love; but I did not want it. I am not hurried. Is any one here?"

Margaret was silent from surprise. That quiet unconcerned voice and manner; could it possibly be feigned? She looked again. A marble statue could not have given less signs of feeling than Agatha. Mrs. Percival knocked at the door.

"Agatha, my darling child, you must be quick; the Colonel is arrived."

A slight alteration was visible in Agatha's clear complexion; the bright colour faded to a paler hue.

"Baker, this brooch is put in horridly; it must be lower down."

Baker objected, and Margaret was asked for an opinion.

"Margaret," said Mrs. Percival coming into the room, "you had better go; you are wanted in the drawing-room." Margaret approached her sister, and, putting aside her veil, whispered as she gave her a parting kiss, "Agatha, dearest, we must be sisters always."

Agatha's lip quivered, and when Margaret moved away, a tear was resting on her cheek. It was the last external symptom of the lingering weakness of her better nature.

A short hour afterwards, and the irrevocable act was sealed. Margaret had stood beside the altar amidst the crowd of interested and curious gazers; she had heard the whispered words of admiration, and watched her sister's unhesitating step, as leaning on her father's arm, she advanced slowly up the aisle. She had noticed the trembling hand which caught the rail for support as Agatha knelt by the side of Colonel Clive, and the self-command which seemed, as by a stern will, to subdue the passing emotion. All this Margaret had seen, and marvelled at the firmness of a worldly mind. But there was one marvel beyond all others. An awful charge was given. It spoke of that dreadful day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and called for a confession of any known impediment which should lawfully prevent the marriage. Margaret involuntarily stretched out her hand to uphold her sister, but Agatha needed no help. Those were not the words to touch a spirit encased in frivolous vanities. No movement of vein or muscle betrayed the secret of internal agitation. Calmly and audibly

she pronounced the words which were to link her fate for life with a man whom in her heart she despised; and when the service was ended no smile could be seen more placid, and no expression more tranquil, than that which rested on the countenance of Agatha Clive.

CHAPTER XXII.

The ball-room was deserted, the guests were gone; servants were busied in extinguishing the lamps; Mrs. Percival, indefatigable to the latest moment, was walking slowly round the room to pick up any stray brooches, fans, or handkerchiefs, and guard them for their rightful owners. Mr. Sutherland leant against the mantle-piece. Dr. Percival sat uneasily in an elbowless chair, and snored loudly; and Margaret looked sad, and wondered why she felt so lonely.

"Bed-time, isn't it?" asked Dr. Percival, turning himself, and rubbing his eyes.

"Three o'clock, just," said Mr. Sutherland taking out his watch.

"Three what? twelve, you mean."

"No, exactly three — look."

Dr. Percival's drooping eyelids were not equal to the effort; he did manage to rouse himself, however, and, pushing away his chair, muttered a command that every one should go to bed directly.

"Yes, my dear, certainly; but I must see that things are a little in order first."

From Mrs. Percival's voice it might have been imagined that three in the afternoon and not three in the morning was the hour. When Dr. Percival was gone, she addressed her brother.

"Now, Henry, confess that it has been a most successful affair."

"Brilliant; but I shall appreciate it better after a night's rest."

"Why did you stay up?" said Margaret kindly; "you were of no use."

"Thank you for the compliment; but I don't think you know how many people I managed to entertain in the course of the evening."

"And you were of great use in the morning, my dear Henry," said Mrs. Percival; "you helped us off at breakfast immensely. I really thought at one time we were going to be dull."

"Nothing new at a wedding," replied Mr. Sutherland.

"No, not at many; but this one was different. I don't see what any of us had to make us dull. It is not like a daughter's going away to India; and then such prospects! By the by, did not you think the Colonel looked extremely well?"

"He ought to have done so, to be in the least bearable by the side of poor Agatha," said Margaret.

"My love, I must insist upon your not saying poor; it sounds as if there was something to make us dislike the marriage."

"Rich, one ought to say," replied Margaret, trying to shake off the depression of spirits, and weariness of body, which she saw were not likely to excite her mother's compassion.

"And an extremely happy thing, too," replied Mrs. Percival. "Whatever befalls us, Agatha will never want money: that is one great satisfaction."

A verse from the Psalms flashed upon Mr. Sutherland's memory. "They think that their riches shall endure for ever." But he only said, "that if worldly advantages were all, Agatha might be envied."

Mrs. Percival frequently found herself thrown back, she scarcely knew how, when talking to her brother; they might start from the same point, but

they seldom came to the same conclusion. A sudden unnatural fit of talkativeness, at this most unnatural hour, had seized her, and without desiring a reply, she returned again to the breakfast; enumerated its perfections, repeated the compliments which had been paid her upon its elegance, remembered the Colonel's last words, and eulogised the taste of his new carriage. From thence she proceeded to a description of her own sensations and fatigue in the afternoon, and the necessity of overlooking her servants' preparations for the evening; ending with,

"You must allow, my dear Henry, that Symonds is a treasure. No one else would have managed as he did, to have the breakfast removed, our dinner disposed of, and the supper all laid ready in the dining-room, without the least fuss."

Mr. Sutherland assented, and if Symonds' excellencies had been less universally admitted, he was too tired to enter into an argument upon the subject.

"I suppose we may go to bed now, mamma," said Margaret, when she saw that nothing remained to be done.

"Yes, my dear, perhaps you had better. I must go into the study and dining-room, and know that all is safe and right; but I shall not want you."

"We breakfast at what time?" said Mr. Sutherland, lighting his candle.

"The usual hour, I hope," observed Margaret. "Of all mistakes, that of upsetting two days when you are not obliged to do it, is one of the greatest."

"But nature, my dear Margaret, imperative necessity, as people call it, what is to be done with it? You must remember I am not used to these gaieties. I shall lie awake for half an hour at least with pale phantoms in white satin dancing before my eyes."

"Take your own time," said Mrs. Percival.

"We shall have breakfast, at any hour, for any one who wants it."

"Thank you; you are kinder than Margaret; I shall never go and see her when she has a home of her own, if she is so unmerciful."

"But," said Mrs. Percival, opening her reticule, "if you really mean to be up so early, Margaret, I may as well give you this note, and then you can send an answer the first thing. I forgot it till just now."

"For me, mamma?"

"Yes, my dear, from Henningsley. Symonds told me that one of the foreign servants brought it and said something about its being intended to be given to-morrow, but that he thought he might as well take it, as he was coming this way. Those people are so stupid."

Mr. Sutherland stopped as he was going to leave the room.

"Only to ask me to lend a book," said Margaret, glancing her eye over the contents. "I will see about it in the morning. Good night, dear mamma."

Mrs. Percival was too busy and at length too wearied to be curious. She hurried away to complete her round of inspection.

Mr. Sutherland laughed, and said that "it was very soon to begin a correspondence."

"A mere matter of business," replied Margaret.

She did not offer to show him the note, and he did not ask to see it. It was indifference on his part, but on hers it was something more. Margaret rose, as she had said, at her usual hour, and the Countess's note came immediately to her remembrance. She sat down to read it again; it had given her great pleasure at night; perhaps it would seem more formal in the morning. But no, there were the same words: an apology from the Countess for troubling her after so short an acquaintance, and a

compliment implied by the assurance, that she could not have taken the liberty with any other person. Then followed the request for a volume of Alfieri, and an excuse for not having called in person, from the fear of intruding at a time when she understood that Margaret's thoughts must be otherwise engaged. And at the end came a wish for Agatha's happiness, which she trusted even a stranger might be permitted to express ; and a hope that before many days had passed, she might have the pleasure of meeting Margaret again. If this note had been from any other person, Margaret would have deemed it merely kind, but considering the difference of rank, it certainly implied a more than common cordiality. She wished she had shown it to her uncle at the moment ; then she would have had his opinion upon it. She could not imagine why she had not done it ; now, if she said any thing about it, he might fancy she was rather too much pleased, and perhaps he would say something more about unequal friendships. The same thought had really been in her mind previously, but it had been unobserved. Margaret had not the most distant idea of misleading her uncle, or keeping any thing back which he ought to know. It was not in her nature to be insincere, but her intercourse with him was a voluntary one, and there was no law to insist upon her confiding to him a prepossession which he might not comprehend. And if Margaret had never consulted her uncle, and put herself, in a measure, under his guidance, her silence might have been justifiable. But when we go to a physician, we act unfairly to him and dangerously for ourselves, if we do not mention the trifling symptoms, which, perhaps, to his experience, may be the most important indications of the nature of our case. Margaret dressed quickly, put up the book, and wrote her answer,

and was happy to find that the subject was not mentioned at the very late breakfast. Agatha, Colonel Clive, and the party, were topics sufficient for the conversation, not merely of that day, but of many succeeding ones.

Mr. Sutherland left the Grove immediately after breakfast, and Margaret for once did not wish him to stay. Mrs. Percival might exert her utmost energies, but she could not at will restore the tone of mind of a whole family; and the discomforts of the day after a wedding and a dance were trying to all. Some months before, Margaret's temper might have been seriously affected by it; and most probably she would have given herself up to a day of idleness; but on this occasion she adopted a plan different from usual. The children were not allowed a holiday, though their disinclination for lessons was set forth in glowing language. Margaret thought with them, that grammar books, and sums, and French verbs, were beyond measure uninteresting, when the spirits were suffering from re-action after over-excitement; but it was rather an argument for, than against their use. Tonics for the mind are as needful when it is unhinged as they are for the body; and bitters, every one knows, produce a very strengthening effect. Margaret administered a special dose to herself, by resisting the temptation of an easy chair, which would have given rest to her weary limbs at the risk of increasing her languor; and then proceeded to deal in the same way, though more leniently, with her pupils. Harriet asked for a holiday, and Grace declared that they quite expected it the day after Agatha's wedding.

"Agatha is enjoying herself very much, I am sure," exclaimed Philip, "so why shouldn't we?"

Margaret breathed a sigh of envy over the

blessed simplicity of childhood; and then said, "that she had not promised a holiday, and she did not think it right to give one."

"Oh! why not? how unkind!" exclaimed Grace and Philip at once.

"Hush!" Margaret held up her finger to enforce silence. "You both know that is not a proper way of speaking. I am the best judge of what is unkind."

Margaret looked very grave, and the children were a little ashamed. One chief excellence in Margaret's qualifications as a governess now was, that she never gave long lectures, so that there was no opportunity of tiring attention, or exciting ridicule.

"You know, Harriet," she continued, without noticing the little ones, "that if you have a holiday, I shall have one too."

"Yes, of course."

"And I shall be able to lie down on the sofa, and go to sleep, or read, or do what I like."

"Yes, I know that."

"But I don't wish to do so, because it is not right to give way when one is tired, unless one is really unwell; and I shall be much happier to rest, when the lessons are over, than I should be if there were none; and so I am sure it will be with you."

"No, indeed, Margaret, indeed it won't," exclaimed Grace.

"Well; whether it will or will not, lessons we must have. Now who will bring the books first."

"But not all the lessons, excuse just a few;" said Harriet, in as coaxing a manner as she could assume.

"I will not promise that I will excuse any. We will do what we can, and then we shall be all the

happier afterwards. You can't think how I am looking forward to lying down by and by."

"Your face is quite white, now," remarked Philip.

"Sleepy, very sleepy, Philip," said Margaret, closing her eyes playfully; "but we are all going to be as busy as possible, so I shall be the first to bring out the books."

"No, no, not you," and Philip tried to keep her in the chair. "You go to sleep, and we will fetch them."

Margaret sat still, and the regular routine of school began. Having afforded no expectation of a holiday, or a half, or a quarter of one, Margaret was not teazed with requests to be spared any particular task. The children knew what was required of them, and if Margaret did not complain, they felt that they had no right to do it. The lessons were, however, finished sooner than usual. Margaret, when the time came, excused one or two little things; dates, and multiplication tables, which were repeated nearly every day, besides asking fewer questions and giving shorter explanations, and so contrived not to overtask their minds, and yet at the same time to preserve the notion of order. The mental powers needed rest, the moral stimulus; and by this means, she hoped that she had succeeded in administering the proper medicine to both.

Margaret was really thankful at the close of the day for the necessity which had forced her to exertion. She could never have imagined beforehand the blank which the loss of Agatha would cause. It was not that they were congenial in taste, or had shared the same pursuits, or even had the same friends and interests. In all these respects they had been separated; but there was the loss of the familiar face, the sight of the empty chair, the impulse to make an observation checked by the re-

collection that there was no one to listen to it. Margaret had never known the fearful void of death, and perhaps for that reason she was the more sensible of the pain of this first parting, and she could not experience the consolation from which her mother so largely profited.

Mrs. Percival repeated about once in every hour that dear Agatha must be enjoying herself thoroughly. She said it to each person who came in, and when there was no listener, repeated it for her own satisfaction. Fond as she really was of her daughter, the separation would otherwise have been a great trial. Margaret could neither assent nor dissent; she could scarcely hope; but she had her own way of gaining comfort, and Agatha's name was mentioned with a fervent prayer for her happiness, which many would have deemed more befitting the day of adversity than of prosperity.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"MRS. ST. AUBYN!" announced the butler, throwing open the door of the drawing-room at Henningsley, and pronouncing the name so as to prevent it from being intelligible to English ears. Mrs. St. Aubyn entered, drawing the folds of her shawl gracefully around her. "I am so happy," she began; but she was stopped by a slight look of surprise, and a distant greeting from Lucia. The Countess was not present. Mrs. St. Aubyn was seldom thrown out of her ordinary self-possession by any mistake; and being informed that the Countess was walking in the grounds, and would probably return in a few minutes, she proceeded to exert her powers of entertainment for the Countess's friend. Lucia had still an air of melancholy, but it was not settled, as when she first came to Henningsley. She had fallen into a certain routine of life, and the number of visitors gave her pleasure. She enjoyed variety, and would have been open to the snares of dissipation, if they had ever been placed within her reach. Besides, the Countess was not taken away from her in the same way as she had been in London, for there were no relations to claim her attention. Neither had Margaret Percival's name been mentioned in a way to re-awaken her jealousy. Beatrice was more watchful over herself than she had been when impressed with the belief that Margaret was a Romanist, for she knew that Lucia would not at all enter into the points of

character which had pleased her, and would only be startled at learning how great an effect had been produced by one whose faith was, as she deemed it, heretical. For many reasons, therefore, Lucia was more inclined for conversation, and more engaging in manner, than she had been before; and Mrs. St. Aubyn, who was easily satisfied by an attentive listening attitude, and soon discovered that Lucia was much more willing to hear than to speak English, contentedly continued the conversation, under the supposition that the Countess would in time make her appearance.

It was desultory at first, touching upon the Countess's stay in London, and upon those of her relations with whom Mrs. St. Aubyn had a personal acquaintance. Lucia gave her opinion unreservedly, and with a little mixture of quick sarcasm, which, joined to her foreign accent, and curious modes of expression, was not unpleasing to a person whose good-nature was superficial. Mrs. St. Aubyn related a few anecdotes in return, and at last ventured upon subjects nearer home. The neighbouring families were brought forward, and Mrs. Percival was alluded to, but Lucia did not like her new friend the better upon finding how nearly she was connected with her.

Mrs. St. Aubyn spoke much in praise of the family, but there was an under current of feeling not perfectly cordial, which would have been evident to one more practised than Lucia in English character and habits of thought. For her own sake Mrs. St. Aubyn pronounced Agatha a lovely, elegant young creature, and Margaret astonishingly clever; but in her heart she was disappointed with both.

Her wish of patronizing had failed: Agatha had assumed a tone of independence from the first

moment of her engagement, and Margaret was not approachable by any of those ingratiating civilities which Mrs. St. Aubyn was in the habit of bestowing upon her favourites. Lucia had quickness enough to perceive that the unmarried sister, whom she supposed at once must be the Countess's acquaintance, was not considered perfect. Cleverness is like good-nature, a point always brought prominently forward, when there are others which it is desirable to keep in the back-ground. Lucia remarked that she thought the Countess must have seen Miss Percival; she had certainly been introduced to one of Mrs. Clive's sisters.

"Yes, that must have been Margaret. She is rather what is called a taking person in society. I mean,"—perceiving Lucia's look of bewilderment, —"that she is good-looking and talks well."

Lucia did not give the Countess's opinion, though Mrs. St. Aubyn was curious to hear it. "We shall not know many people here," she said: "the Countess will stay a very little while."

"Really! how tantalizing!" replied Mrs. St. Aubyn. "We had all hoped that the Countess would have fixed upon Henningsley as her residence."

"The Signora is so fond of Italy," replied Lucia.

"Yes, and it is extremely natural; but she would like this place very much if she were to remain here long enough to know every one. Perhaps, though, the climate would not suit her: is she delicate?"

"Si, no, si," exclaimed Lucia, not liking the question. "La Signora sta bene." The sentence required to be interpreted, for Mrs. St. Aubyn had no knowledge of Italian; and Lucia, blushing, explained that the Countess was seldom ill.

"Indeed! she has rather a hectic flush; and both her parents died of consumption."

They were thoughtless words, and they caused an enduring pain. Lucia was fully aware of the fatal disease which for generations had carried off the youngest and fairest of the house of de Lisle; but in her devotion to the Countess she had never seriously entertained the idea that she could be subject to this or any other of the sufferings of mortality. Mrs. St. Aubyn marked the glistening eye of the excitable Italian girl, and was hurt at the distress which she had so unintentionally occasioned. Her manner softened into sympathy, and Lucia was touched by it. Kindness in any shape soon found entrance to her heart, and in this instance it was united to a hearty appreciation of the one object of her affection. Mrs. St. Aubyn admired, as Lucia believed the Countess ought to be admired, without qualification; and in her enthusiasm she overlooked her connection with Margaret Percival, and thought only of the similarity of taste. Mrs. St. Aubyn on her part was struck by the originality of her new acquaintance. It was long since she had met with any person so calculated to arouse attention from her peculiarities. The curious style of dress, the foreign manner, and the strange accent, were all in their way interesting; and Mrs. St. Aubyn was strongly inclined to believe that, for the time being, Lucia might supply the place of her former favourite, Agatha.

"Is the Countess quite resolved never to go out?" she said, wishing to try how far Lucia was independent.

"Quite, whilst we are here. She went out in London."

"But you must wish for society, and you have none."

"We see the people when they call," was the reply.

"That is not the sort of thing I mean; it is not society."

"I have no wish for more," said Lucia.

"But that can scarcely be at your age; in a new country."

"Mi piace—it is very well," replied Lucia.

Mrs. St. Aubyn was going to reason against any such ignoble contentment, when the Countess appeared. Lucia looked at her with an uneasiness which she had never known before. There was a little colour on her cheek when she came in, but it soon faded away, and she seemed fatigued. This Lucia persuaded herself was very natural, for Beatrice had been giving orders for some alterations in the grounds, and had been walking and standing about; but Mrs. St. Aubyn noticed the same varying complexion, and with a less interested eye perceived in it the symptoms of an inherent delicacy of constitution. Lucia's face was lighted up with satisfaction when she no longer was obliged to take the first part in the conversation. She was not shy, but it was difficult as yet to converse fluently in a new language, and she was sensitively alive to the ridicule which she had understood the English were accustomed to bestow upon foreigners. There was nothing however in Mrs. St. Aubyn's manner to excite this dread; and Lucia, to her own surprise, found that under the shadow of the Countess's protection, her English phrases came comparatively without difficulty. They were but trifles which induced her to look favourably upon Mrs. St. Aubyn, but Lucia felt at ease with her; and when, as they parted, another regret was expressed that they had declined all society, she was not sorry to hear the Countess modify the declara-

tion, and say, that although she had considered retirement desirable for herself, it might be less advantageous for Lucia, and she should be sorry to be a check upon her pleasure. Mrs. St. Aubyn was pleased at the opening; for she did not dislike the idea of perhaps chaperoning the young Italian, the friend of the Countess Novera; and, as an earnest of future kindness, she pressed Lucia's hand warmly at parting, and good-naturedly wished that it might be in her power to assist in making her stay in the neighbourhood agreeable.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THERE were many conflicting feelings in Margaret's breast during the first week which followed her sister's marriage. Interest for Agatha, and wishes for her own improvement, were often present; but with all other thoughts came some remembrance of the Countess Novera.

And there was nothing unnatural, scarcely enthusiastic, in this. The Countess returned Mrs. Percival's visit, and the charms of her society lost nothing by repetition. The ordinary conversation which passed gave rise to opinions upon books, and, as a necessary consequence, followed little interchanges of civility; volumes lent and returned, and notes written to accompany them; excuses for delay, and petitions for more; and, at last, a request that Margaret would call at Henningsley whenever she walked in that direction. No one could fairly have objected to the intimacy at any particular stage, or have said that it was injudicious in the Countess, or dangerous for Margaret, for the advances were scarcely perceptible. Even Mrs. Percival did not understand more than that the Countess liked to speak Italian, and had discovered that Margaret knew the language. This was all which Margaret herself said, for she disliked the idea of making much of an acquaintance which was only in its germ; and the tone in which her mother sometimes prophesied half in jest, and half in earnest, that she would in time be the Countess's friend, offended her taste. The question whether she was entering upon a safe path did

not offer itself to Margaret's mind. She did not know that she was entering upon any path. Every incident which added to her knowledge of the Countess's character, was in itself trifling; and at the end of a month she could not have said, with truth, that they were well acquainted. Yet Margaret was unsuspiciously yielding herself to a new influence. The thought which wakes with us in the morning, and follows us to our rest at night, and obtrudes itself in the intervals of business and amusement, cannot be without its effect. In days gone by this thought had been the longing for an unreal world: now, it was the remembrance of an earthly being. What the Countess had said or thought; what were the opinions which she had brought forward; what was the probability of their meeting; — these were now the subjects of most frequent recurrence, subdued indeed and mastered by the higher principle which actuated Margaret's life, but seldom or never banished. One thing might have given rise to a suspicion that all was not right. This interest alone was not shared by Mr. Sutherland. The first reserve was now increasing, though Margaret never tasked herself to discover why. She mentioned the facts, but she offered no comment upon them; and the facts themselves were not worth consideration. Nothing was passing, to Mr. Sutherland's knowledge, which was not required by common civility; and it was not to be supposed that Margaret, who was unreserved with him upon all other subjects, should withhold this one.

Beatrice in the mean while was associating herself with Margaret as constantly, but in a very different spirit. Hers was, as Father Andrea had foreseen, the governing mind. Age, and rank, and knowledge of the world were on her side, and her

soul was born to command. In childhood she had ruled with undisturbed sway over her father and her father's household; in love, she had exacted the most devoted tenderness; in marriage, she had been happy, because, joined to respect for her husband's character, she knew that she was entirely mistress of his every thought; and in friendship, she desired an affection the same in kind, though it must of necessity be less in degree. Only in religion could she be humble; and religion interposed no obstacle to her intercourse with Margaret Percival. Father Andrea's observant eye took cognisance of all that passed before it, and in his character of confessor he gained an insight into facts and feelings which would in themselves necessarily have been concealed. His ulterior views were not displayed, for Beatrice was not as yet possessed by the spirit of proselytism; and if the idea were unguardedly presented to her, she would be likely to commence the attack openly; in which case it would be almost certain to fail. The prejudices of a Protestant would be shocked, and Margaret would either herself break off the acquaintance, or her family would insist upon its being stopped. Father Andrea was by nature cautious, and the habits of his religious education had made him more so. The first thing to be gained was Margaret's heart, and this he could perceive was fast yielding to the Countess. They had spent several afternoons together, not by appointment, but from the wish to prolong an agreeable visit, and Father Andrea had occasionally been with them. Perhaps he came into the room in search of a book; or he had been found there when Margaret called; or he was going out, and had some question to ask previously. Some reason was always at hand, and the Countess was so used to his presence that she never allowed it to disturb the

conversation or the employment of the hour. Margaret felt a little awkward at first, for her awe of a Romish priest was great; but Father Andrea, upon nearer observation, gave her the impression of being entirely abstracted. He asked his question of the Countess, and bowed to her, and perhaps enquired after her family; but he seldom did more; and if he remained in the room he took up a book, and scarcely ever raised his eyes from its pages. Margaret had no self-important ideas, and believing herself insignificant in every way, could not wonder that the Romish confessor did not think it worth while to converse with her. When she thought this, Margaret knew but little of the windings of the human heart. Father Andrea sat with his elbow leaning on the arm-chair, his head resting on his hand, and his eyes riveted on the volume before him; but the words which met his view did not gain an entrance into his mind. It was the ear which was opened, and through that channel came the knowledge which was to enable him to work, as he believed, for the salvation of a misguided girl. He had never yet ventured upon any observation which might betray his consciousness of what was said either by Beatrice or Margaret, though there was much to interest a cultivated and high-toned mind. The Countess was but partially acquainted with English literature, and in her desire to profit by the present season of leisure she had commenced a course of study with the energy which was so strong an ingredient in her character. Margaret was her counsellor, and occasionally her instructor. She would throw light upon some abstruse passage in Shakspeare; or bring her knowledge of history to support a contested point; or give a slight sketch of a distinguished character alluded to in the course of a discussion. From the necessity of instructing

the children, all these things were familiar to her; and the Countess's rapid mind delighted in gaining information without the trouble of searching for it. Father Andrea heard, and often wondered. His task appeared a more difficult one than he had imagined; for he saw that Margaret was something more than poetical and enthusiastic; she was well-informed, and had been accustomed to read and think much. Yet her information was not of a kind likely to be really an obstacle to his wishes. It embraced a large circle; so he perceived, from the ease with which she pursued the most widely different topics; but the history of the Church did not apparently form a part of it. Religion was naturally kept mostly in the back-ground; still, occasionally it was touched upon, and Margaret glided over it, and went on fluently, and without distrust. Every thing was taken for granted. Her faith in the English Church was based upon habit, early prejudice, a belief that what was established must, of necessity, be right. This the confessor conjectured soon after his first introduction to her. She conceded, without difficulty, the title of Catholic; talked of the Established Church of England and the Established Church of Scotland in the same terms; she even once spoke of a person, whose name was casually mentioned, as an Unitarian clergyman. This was merely custom, for Margaret did actually know that a difference existed, but it was seldom brought prominently forward, and scarcely ever acted upon; and it is only by action that our belief, of whatever kind, is matured so as really to deserve the name.

Margaret would indeed have been surprised if she had known how her character had been examined and understood in the course of the few hours which had been spent in the presence of

Father Andrea: for, taken together, they were but few, and when they were over she could only say that they had been spent agreeably; that the Countess was a very charming person. There was nothing beyond; no expression of affection, nor of peculiar interest. It was outwardly but the ordinary intimacy which springs up between minds of a similar cast, and which, after forming the amusement and solace of a few weeks, is often destroyed by circumstances, and perhaps never renewed again. If it had been more, Margaret's conscience might have been alarmed; she might have asked whether her uncle would approve, and have reproached herself for insincerity; but the feelings which were latent in her own breast, and gathering strength at each interview, required some expressions from the Countess to call them into active existence. Besides, Margaret had in her own heart a testimony that nothing had as yet done her harm. Day by day she awoke to her duties, humble and sincere; and day by day those duties were more carefully performed. Her position in the family was materially altered, and Mr. Sutherland's warning of the extent to which the happiness of all depended upon her, was continually brought to mind. Mrs. Percival indeed still talked much of Agatha, the day when she was to return, and the gaieties which were to follow; but her real happiness was derived from Margaret. She confessed herself that it was strange how quickly Agatha's place had been filled up. "Every one must miss her, dear child, extremely; but, somehow, Margaret was so clever, she managed to make things go on just as well. It really seemed as if it were a good thing for her to have so much employment, for she did not forget as she used to do."

Margaret thought this herself. There was no

struggle now between her favourite occupations and her family duties. It was clear that the sacrifice must be made; she must give herself up for the general comfort. The children, visitors, notes, entertainments,—nothing could be done without her; and if strict unceasing self-denial was required, yet at the close of the day there was the great reward: she could lie down to sleep happy, not that her work had been performed well, but that it had been carried through vigorously, with a strong will and a watchful eye, and offered in gratitude to God for the mercy which had received her as His child. Margaret's seasons of enjoyment appeared likely to be fewer than ever; but, in fact, they were merely spread over a wider surface. That to which she gave her full attention was soon invested with interest, and the children especially became more and more engrossing both to her time and her affections. Through them she frequently contrived to visit Henningsley when she could not otherwise have spared the time. It was easy to take them into the grounds, and leave them to amuse themselves under the eye of the gardener, whilst she paid her visit to the Countess; and in this way they were the means of giving her the greatest pleasure which she now experienced.

The six weeks of Agatha's absence were drawing to an end. The second visit to the Continent, which had once been proposed, was deferred to a future occasion, and the time had been spent in visits to Colonel Clive's relations in the north. If letters were to be believed, the period had been one of undisturbed serenity. Fine weather, and kind friends, and unbounded luxury, these were the constant themes. Mrs. Percival looked no farther; perhaps even if she had looked she would not have perceived; for there is a dimness of the mental vision

which, from being in its origin wilful, is more incurable than any physical blindness. Margaret ran through her sister's letters, seeking for that which she never found. Colonel Clive's relations might be kind, but he himself was scarcely named. Descriptions of dinner parties, and fêtes, and beautiful scenery, filled up the pages; but no word betrayed the secret either of satisfaction or melancholy.

Agatha's letters were cheerful, — that was all which could be said of them; to Margaret they were bright and cold, as sunshine upon ice. Margaret had indulged one hope for Agatha's happiness; she had believed Colonel Clive to be really attached to her, and she had thought it possible that constant attention and consideration might by degrees inspire something of a feeling of love,— such love as Agatha required. How under the circumstances he should not have perceived Agatha's indifference was astonishing; but still cases of the kind have been known, and love on one side was at least better than on neither. There were, however, but slight traces of this love in any thing which Agatha wrote. It was not often 'Colonel Clive wishes,' or 'is anxious,' 'or hopes,' but 'Colonel Clive says we must;' and 'must,' though a very fitting word in a husband's mouth, is seldom brought into play at the beginning of a married life. If Agatha did not rule, even her own mistaken hopes of happiness must fall to the ground, for of all tyrannies, that of a weak intellect is the most galling. Margaret could not dare to wish; she could not pray that Agatha might be blessed according to her own view of earthly felicity; and yet it was sad to think of the suffering to which her uncle had referred as almost the only hope of purifying a vain and selfish mind.

Mrs. Percival counted with eagerness the days which must soon pass by before Agatha should be

established in splendour, — the mistress of Ashington Court. Her drive was now frequently with Mrs. St. Aubyn in this direction, under the excuse of giving an order, but in reality to indulge a species of prospective greatness. "Ashington was exactly the place for Agatha," she said; — "large, and lofty, and extremely elegant: nothing of the low rooms and dark windows which it was the fashion for some persons to admire." There was a beautiful Corinthian portico, and a saloon filled with statues, and a long dining-room, just suited for a princely entertainment, such as Colonel Clive would of course give. Then the drawing-rooms were furnished in such good taste, with hangings of the palest blue, and sofas, and chaises longues, and every refinement of luxury in the newest fashion. Some persons had said maliciously that they gave the idea of an upholsterer's shop; but this could only be envy. Mr. Fitzhardinge, Colonel Clive's uncle, from whom he had inherited the property, was a person of acknowledged superiority in all such matters, and had newly furnished the house only six months before his death. The park too was delightful, extensive, and in beautiful order; not wooded as much as Henningsley, and more level, but containing splendid and most valuable timber, and well stocked with deer. Margaret had never cared much for Ashington; it was too modern; and the Fitzhardinges were a prosperous unromantic family, and had not been its possessors for more than sixty or seventy years. She had no regret on being told the day before Colonel Clive and Agatha were expected, that she must not go with Mrs. St. Aubyn, as had been arranged, because Mrs. Percival had some instructions to give which had been sent in the last letter, and in that case there would be no one to walk with the children. Margaret was very willing to be put aside, and

planned instead two visits, one of duty, the other of pleasure; and both she thought more likely to be agreeable in the retrospect than a drive with Mrs. St. Aubyn, and a tedious two hours at Ashington. Miss Debrett's was the duty visit. She had not been well, and was greatly dependent for amusement upon morning calls, especially from any of the family at the Grove. Agatha's letters were always read to her, and she knew better than any one else the exact days fixed by the Colonel for reaching any particular place, the length of the visit, and the time which was to elapse before they were to return home. If Agatha's marriage had been useful to no one else, certainly it had been to her. It gave her subjects for thought and conversation at all hours and in all society; and now every little detail was seized upon, and treasured up, and recounted, in order to fill up the void in a weak, fanciful mind, as well as from the real affection which made the least event of consequence when it concerned those she loved. Margaret stood at the door holding the handle of the bell; but she had not rung it, when an exclamation from one of the children stopped her: — "Craven! Craven! — yes, just look, Margaret, that is Craven, I am sure." Philip ran off, followed by Grace. Margaret looked again. She could not see distinctly, and she did not like to go forwards. A few steps more, however, brought the gentlemanly figure of the young officer more plainly into view, and she walked towards him quickly. Grace held his hand, jumping with delight at every step; and Margaret was pleased, but not quite as much so as she would once have been. Her first impression used to be of his handsome face and his open-hearted manner; they were unchanged; but Margaret had lately caught a glimpse of the world within, and she was dissatisfied.

"Well, Margaret, this is delightful," was Craven's salutation; "we must not kiss, I suppose, in the high-road?"

"Not quite," said Margaret, laughing: "we will take the kiss for granted. But, Craven, what a strange thing for you to come in this way!"

"Strange! no, not at all. I said I should get leave the first moment I could; and things are quiet now. A troop of horse, and a little mock firing, soon brought the Paddies to their senses."

"I can't help wishing they had been in their senses six weeks ago," said Margaret; "we had nothing but lamentations from mamma over your absence."

"Maternal pride, I suppose. She wanted to exhibit the perfections of her son and her son-in-law side by side. By the by, Margaret,——;" and Craven swung his cane with an air of would-be unconsciousness—"What is the latest intelligence from the Pyramids?"

"The Pyramids?" repeated Margaret.

"Yes; how do they bear their loss? The great Cheops, I mean, and his brother mummies. Did they send a deputation to dance at the wedding?"

"Hush! Craven," said Margaret, looking at the children; "you really should remember: connections are serious things."

"Most serious and valuable; inestimable in the present case. Agatha is a very wise girl."

"Time will prove," replied Margaret. "Grace, my dear, run on with Philip and Harriet to the next gate."

"Solon, as usual," exclaimed Craven. "If Agatha is not wise, I know who is; but when is this golden age to return?"

"To-morrow, we expect; so you are come just in time."

"Even so. I have always had a conviction that I was born under a fortunate star, and it was never stronger than at this moment. The Colonel will be fond of me, don't you think he will?"

"Really I don't know," said Margaret. "Not if you are so conceited."

"Conceited! nay, that is the last thing I am to be accused of. My only misfortune is that I am too humble. I can't push myself on in the world."

"Or rather, you try hard, and the world pushes you back."

"We won't argue the point: pushing, or not pushing, it is clear that I do not have my deserts."

"No," said Margaret, "I really do not think you do."

Craven stopped and laughed, and then assuming a graver tone, he said, "Margaret, I don't trust you: you are not my friend."

"Yes, indeed, Craven; but it is no proof of affection to encourage extravagance."

"Pretty well that for a younger sister!" exclaimed Craven, drawing up his head proudly.

"No, it is not at all well," replied Margaret. "Younger sisters have no business to say such things; but if elder brothers will put them in a false position, and tell them their follies, what is to be done?"

"You are a good child, Margaret, I know," said Craven, "and I don't find fault: I am not come over for that purpose."

"You are come over to see us, are you not?" said Margaret, looking alarmed.

"Hem; — yes, to see you certainly."

"And for nothing else?"

"Can't exactly say that, if you put me on my word of honour. But don't frighten yourself, Mar-

garet; things are never the better for looking at them with a black face."

"Indeed, Craven, it is very hard to look at your things, as you call them, with any other. You forget what it is to see papa worried."

"No, believe me, I don't forget. It is the very reason which induced me to come over. I never mean to worry him any more."

"Really, are you in earnest?" and Margaret's face brightened.

"Not any more till next time. Seriously though, Margaret," he added, perceiving her vexation; "I mean to get out of my difficulties somehow. I have had thoughts lately of trying my luck amongst the Egyptians. Since Agatha has caught such a splendid specimen, why shouldn't I? What do you say to Mrs. St. Aubyn?" Margaret drew her arm away.

"Craven, this is unkind in you. If you are jesting, just tell me so at once."

"Nay, Margaret, it is you who are unkind in supposing it possible I should jest upon such a tender subject." Margaret made no answer. "Well! we won't quarrel," continued Craven, good-naturedly forcing her to take his arm again; "there's nothing so very dreadful after all; but you know I love dearly to tease you."

"We will not quarrel, certainly," replied Margaret, firmly; "but I don't pretend to say that I am satisfied. I think there is something amiss."

"Just so far amiss as there always must be when a young man enters the army with a shabby allowance," said Craven.

"But the army is your profession; it is to be your support."

"Support!" he exclaimed, ironically. "You know what the cow did, Margaret, when the old woman supported her upon a straw a day."

"Your allowance would purchase a good many straws," replied Margaret.

"Yes, straws I grant you; but who is to live upon straws? It is absurd talking. A young girl like you, just out of the school-room, can know nothing of the matter."

"Then why tell me any thing about it?"

"I don't know. I was a fool, I believe, for my pains." He tossed his stick in the air and caught it again, and then calling to Philip, threatened to chase him to the next elm tree. Margaret could not help fearing that she had said something injudicious, and retaining his hand as he was about to set off in pursuit of Philip, she said:

"I wish, Craven, you would tell me if I can be of any use to you."

"You could be of the greatest; but I am sure you won't be; so I shall not trouble you."

Margaret's resentment was roused, but her habitual watchfulness checked it.

"I am sure I will be, if it is right," she said mildly. "When will you tell me what I can do?"

"Not now, not now," he exclaimed with impatience. The next instant he was running at full speed after Philip.

Margaret watched him as he caught the child, and held him up in derision; then putting him on the ground, he turned into a lane, and, vaulting over a gate, called out "good bye" to Margaret, as she passed, and strode across the fields to the Grove. Margaret was vexed both with him and herself, and as it was now out of her power to visit Miss Debrett, she pursued her walk to Henningsley.

CHAPTER XXV.

"FATHER," said the Countess, addressing her confessor, and putting a letter into his hands, "I must ask your advice."

Father Andrea, who was standing by the fire, which burnt cheerfully on the bright October morning, answered her with more than usual gravity.

"Is the matter a very important one, my daughter?"

"That means you would rather defer it; but it is important in so far as I must decide upon it soon; and as I expect Miss Percival in an hour's time, I should be glad to have my mind settled before she comes."

Father Andrea held out his hand for the letter.—"I will not trouble you to read it," continued the Countess. "There is very little that would interest you, except the business part. Lady Anstruther wishes me to spend the winter with her in Devonshire." Father Andrea neither moved nor spoke, and a person less accustomed to his manner would have supposed that he was giving no attention. Beatrice, however, went on: "I will read you what she says. — 'We have a large house, in a most delightful climate, the best in England. If you will come you shall have rooms for yourself, and Father Andrea, and Lucia; any one, in short, whom you may choose to bring. I am more particularly anxious about it, because, after the conversation we had in London, I cannot think the bleak air of

Henningsley at all suited to your constitution. You are not easily alarmed, I know; and I really see no reason to be so now; but you must remember that the place has not agreed with many of your family, and this first winter in England must of necessity be very trying.'" Beatrice put the letter upon the table, and laying her hand upon Father Andrea's arm, she said, with a smile, "Now, Father, advise me."

The confessor looked sadly at her beautiful face, and an expression far different from hers told the thoughts which were working in his breast. — "Lady Anstruther is your true friend," he said.

"With regard to my health? but indeed, Father, that is over anxiety. I never was better: do I look ill?" The brilliant colour and the sparkling eyes answered the question for the moment to Father Andrea's satisfaction. He was not used to watch the progress of the insidious disease of a northern climate.

"What I really wish to know," continued Beatrice, "is whether it would be right. Just as I am established here, and have made myself occupations amongst the tenantry, and when you own that you see a prospect of usefulness for yourself, is it right to go away?"

"You would go to Italy," said Father Andrea.

"I don't know; I have not thought about it lately: but if I did, that would be different, because I have claims in Italy as well as England. It would not be a question of mere choice."

"What does Lady Anstruther mean by the conversation you had in London?" inquired the confessor. "You never mentioned it to me."

"Because it was not worth while. I know you are apt to alarm yourself without cause. She told

me that I resembled my mother, and then she bade me be careful."

"You should have mentioned this, my daughter; it might have caused a change in your movements."

"Oh! no;" and the Countess laughed; "it would have been too absurd, when it was the height of summer, to have been afraid of coming here. Lady Anstruther herself said it would probably do me good: she only objects for the winter."

"Then I would listen to her," said Father Andrea, gravely. "It will be safer, and your plans for good may be entrusted to other hands."

The Countess looked disappointed and said, "There are many things which would keep me here; and I hoped you would have seen them: Lucia at length appears contented."

"Yes, but we must not depend upon her."

"It is rest for the present," said the Countess, heaving a sigh of relief. "I can never be sufficiently thankful to Mrs. St. Aubyn for giving her amusement."

"I would rather her contentment arose from a different source," replied Father Andrea; "yet I have no reason as yet to believe that it has done her harm. Her attachment to our Holy Church is unwavering."

"And it will remain so, I am certain," exclaimed Beatrice; "but her present enjoyment is natural. Remember, Father, how very young she is."

"I would not check her," he replied; "yet I may be allowed to wish that there were less of the world's leaven in her amusements."

"Time will work a change," said the Countess. "She will be grave enough even for me, Father, before many years have passed over her head."

"It would be better to offer an untainted sacrifice," said the confessor. "It must be less danger-

ous for ourselves, and more acceptable to our God."

"Ah, father, who does offer it?" said Beatrice, in a melancholy tone, whilst a tide of self-upbraiding reflections forced themselves upon her mind.

"None as we could wish, my daughter," replied the father, mildly; "and therefore must we pray, and watch, and fast, and subdue the flesh, to obey the motions of the spirit."

"Lucia does all this," replied the Countess.

"Yes, and therefore I am not as yet afraid; but the intimacy which you think of consequence would not weigh with me, to induce me to urge your remaining here. There is another, which may be of far greater importance."

"Margaret Percival," said the Countess, and a bright colour overspread her features. "Father, you have promised to warn me when I was trusting myself too far."

"You have not done it," he said, quickly; "if the interests of an immortal soul are at stake, they are hers not yours."

The Countess looked at him steadily, to catch the import of his words. "Do I teach her harm?" she asked, with anxiety.

Father Andrea allowed a smile of pleasure, such as seldom brightened his stern features, to rest upon his lips; and as the Countess seated herself by his side, he laid his hand upon her head and said, — "The blessing of heaven be upon you, my daughter; you can never teach harm to any one. No, it was of good that I spoke — unspeakable, immeasurable. Upon you may rest the salvation of an undying spirit."

Beatrice bent her eyes humbly to the ground as she replied: "I had no such thought, father; you expect a zeal which I do not possess."

"There was no need of it hitherto," he answered. "The wisdom of the serpent must warn us not to rush blindly forward in pursuit of any object. If your zeal had been awakened, I must have checked it; but the time is come now. Miss Percival has not been thrown in your way for nought. Heaven has had mercy upon her youth and innocence, and wills that the talents which are now devoted to error, should be directed into their proper channel."

"But, father," exclaimed the Countess, in astonishment, "surely you cannot be a judge of her character — of the probability of success."

"Nay, my daughter, upon that point you are in ignorance. Shall I tell you the state of Miss Percival's mind at this moment?"

Beatrice was silent.

"There are within her two contending principles," he continued; "or rather they are not principles, they are feelings. One is the breathing of an immortal spirit for the happiness which this world cannot give; the other is the dawning of a love for a human being, such as hitherto, I firmly believe, she has never experienced. She would serve her God, and she would devote herself to you."

"To me, father," exclaimed the Countess; "me whom she has known so little!"

"It matters not; I have watched her narrowly and the experience of years has taught me much of the working of the human heart. If her devotion to you is now only in its germ, it may be ripened into fulness, and that quickly.

Beatrice rose and walked a few paces apart, in deep thought; then abruptly turning to him, she said, "And I too, father, could love a heretic. Yes," she added, seeing that he hesitated to reply

"I would not, even if I could, conceal any thing from you. There is a love which nothing can recall; it is buried in my husband's grave, and on earth it can never wake again. Since that hour of desolation, when I watched his dying bed, human affection has seemed almost dead within me, save only in my reverence for you; but now it has again revived. It may be delusion, father; it may be folly; and I know — I would confess — that it is sin," she added, in a deep, low tone.

"Sin, if it should lead you to a neglect of our holy faith, my daughter; but not sin, if it should lead to the gathering of a lost sheep into the one true fold. Let your love be hallowed by this hope, and you need not fear it."

"Hope!" exclaimed the Countess, whilst a sudden enthusiasm lighted up her countenance. "Can you really think that there is hope?"

"The greatest — almost certain hope; but every thing will depend upon your caution."

"Then I need not go away; I may spend the dreary winter months in my home," said Beatrice.

Father Andrea smiled at the change from her late disappointment at Henningsley, and to this sudden attachment for it. "You may not further your cause by that means," he replied; "and I will own I would not trust you: one unguarded word, and all may be lost. There is now a principle superior to Miss Percival's dawning affection for you — the religion which clings to the cold faith of her Protestant ancestors. Once alarm her on this point, and she will feel it a duty to draw back."

"Pardon me, father, but you are seemingly inconsistent," said the Countess. "I am to believe that there is hope, but I am not to act upon it; and it appears that I am not to remain in the only spot where I can expect to be of use."

"Your health is the first great object," replied the confessor. "I have heard warnings upon the subject before. At least, for this first winter, it will be advisable to avoid all risk; and for use, you may perhaps do more by your absence than your presence. You must find some excuse for writing; Miss Percival will be flattered; and it will afford you opportunities for saying all that is necessary, without giving rise to suspicion."

"And I must go then!" exclaimed the Countess. "I must leave the only spot where I have found sympathy, and go amongst those who look with suspicion on my religion, and only think it necessary to pay me attentions because I am their relation."

"Your affection for one person ought not to render you unjust to others, my daughter," said Father Andrea in a severe tone.

At that moment the pealing of the hall bell gave warning of a visitor.

"It may be Mrs. St. Aubyn," said the Countess; "she was to call for Lucia." There was a flush on her cheek as she spoke, which the expectation of seeing Mrs. St. Aubyn would not have caused.

Father Andrea collected some letters that were lying on the table, but waited till the arrival should be announced. "You said, I think, that you expected Miss Percival," he observed, turning to Beatrice.

"She sent word that she would come if possible, but it was doubtful."

The servant's footsteps sounded in the ante-room.

"Caution," said Father Andrea in a low voice: "remember there must be no betrayal of our wishes."

Beatrice bowed assent, and the next moment Margaret entered. The Countess advanced eagerly to meet her, but it was with emotions which she

could little have defined. Pleasure there was, such as she had never experienced before in Margaret's society; for who could be insensible to the thought of inspiring love, almost devotion, in one so untouched by the world — so simple, and ardent, and highly gifted? Yet as she gazed upon the sweet features, from which all signs of care had faded before the enjoyment of the moment, a pang, a transient but deep pang of regret, crossed the Countess's mind. Before the object which had been set before her could be attained, that easy cheerfulness must be destroyed by the most painful doubt; that quiet repose of manner must be disturbed by a conflict of mind, involving, it might be, a keener agony than any bodily suffering; and she herself was to inflict the suffering, not openly, but through the means of a pure confiding affection. The Countess's smile of welcome was checked, and the gloom which spread itself over her countenance was evident to Margaret's watchful eye. It was gone, however, almost as soon as noticed. Come what might, suffering or sorrow, of whatever kind, or to whatever extent, it was for the right cause. Who would not joy over martyrdom on earth, to win the crown of glory in heaven? Father Andrea remained in the room, silent and occupied as usual; and the Countess, placing Margaret on a sofa which fronted a lovely slope of the smooth lawn, and a glade of the park, terminated by the grey church tower, drew a low, old fashioned chair to her side, and said, almost caressingly, as she attempted to draw off her shawl:

"You are come to spend a long two hours with me, so I must be careful of you."

"O no, indeed," replied Margaret; "not two hours — scarcely one. I am later than I expected."

"But you promised me, and I have been looking forward to it."

"I must not waste my precious moments in excuses," said Margaret, with a smile; "they are indeed very few; but I have remembered the book—the 'Milton.'"

She laid the volume on the table, and the Countess took it up, and turned over the pages. "Difficillissime," she said, shaking her head.

"Not worse than Dante," replied Margaret.

"Perhaps not; but I do not think an Englishman or an English woman's comprehension of Dante (forgive me for saying so) would satisfy me."

"I must own it is the comprehension of the head, and not of the heart, in general," replied Margaret.

"Yes, and perhaps necessarily: really to understand a book, one must enter into the author's tone of mind, and know the characteristics of the age in which he lived."

"I should despair of ever doing that with Dante," said Margaret. "What with the unsettled condition of the whole of Christendom, and the particular turmoils of his own city, one could scarcely hope to enter into the feelings of an ordinary individual, still less to fathom such depths as his must have reached."

"I shall turn round upon you with Milton," said the Countess, playfully, "and give up the attempt. Contrast these days of peace with his stormy ones."

"But the stormy ones were nearer our own times; and there are histories, and memoirs, and information of every kind to throw light upon them. I really hope you will try the book."

"And yet you acknowledge that Milton is no favorite."

"It is a dreadful heresy, I know," said Margaret.

"I never confess it if I can help it, because people put it down as presumptuous: but he shocks me. Whilst he keeps to earth, I can admire heartily; but when he ventures beyond I am obliged to turn away. I dare say the fault is in my own irreverent mind."

"Then why should I read it?" inquired the Countess.

"Because it is one of our standard works, and there are very great beauties in it; and, in fact, you can be no judge of English literature unless you do."

The Countess again took up the volume. "I remember longing to read it as a child," she said; "and my father would not allow it. He was extremely careful then, for he used sometimes to fancy I had a leaning towards Protestantism."

"I don't think Lord de Lisle had reason to fear Milton," said Margaret. "He is not likely to excite much sympathy in a Roman Catholic."

Father Andrea, who had been sitting at a little distance, now, to Margaret's great surprise, rose and joined them; and, as if struck by the last words, he repeated them, and said in an indifferent tone —

"Will Miss Percival do me the favour to tell me why?"

Margaret blushed deeply, and hesitated. "His religion," she said; "he was such a violent Puritan."

"And do you dislike him for that reason?" inquired the Countess, quickly.

"Partly; and in politics likewise, all my principles go against him."

"You object to his religion, because he was an enemy to forms," said Father Andrea.

"Yes, in a certain way; but ——," Margaret laughed, and added, "I don't think I am fond of

being examined as to my likings and dislikings. I am afraid too often they are mere questions of taste."

"But religion cannot be," said the Countess, more gravely than was her wont.

Margaret coloured.

"I know it is usual for members of the Establishment in England to object to the principles of the Puritans," said Father Andrea; "but I could never obtain any satisfactory reason why; and I thought that perhaps Miss Percival's course of reading might have enabled her to enlighten me."

Margaret was displeased at the compliment implied, for she could not believe it to be sincere.

"I should have supposed," she said, "that after so many years of controversy, the case would have been made plain by books."

"Then your studies cannot have led you very deep in controversy," replied Father Andrea; "or your intellect must be much clearer than other persons."

"The usual end of controversy being to prove that both sides are wrong; is it not, father?" said the Countess, lightly.

"In many cases it may be, my daughter," replied the confessor, speaking so seriously that Margaret wondered at the Countess's boldness; "but you must remember that truth still exists; and that to see error in all things is not the right way of ascertaining it."

The Countess laid her hand affectionately upon his as he rested it on the table, and said,—"I never yet made a hasty speech in your presence, father, without quickly perceiving my folly."

"We will not call it folly," he replied; "there is wisdom in it; for all controversy which is not

based upon some deep truth must at last come to this point. Such, I should venture to say, if Miss Percival would pardon me, has always appeared to me to be the case in the discussions between the Establishment in England and the other sects against which it contends."

"We do not call ourselves a sect," said Margaret, whose spirit was a little roused by the equality thus asserted for Dissenters.

"Yet upon what grounds? A sect is a section, a party, a small number; and even in England the Establishment can scarcely be said to command any large majority of the population."

"But we have antiquity, and law, and sobriety of forms, and so much on our side," said Margaret, seizing in her haste upon the first weapons of defence which offered themselves.

"Granted entirely; and if we had now for the first time to choose for ourselves amongst the different religious systems of the day, undoubtedly yours would have great claims upon our attention. But this will not suffice in an argument. We may not deliver up a contested estate into the hands of the claimant who most pleases our taste."

"You are rather hard upon Miss Percival, father," said the Countess, observing Margaret's look of annoyance at being thus drawn into a conversation for which she was not prepared.

"Which is my last wish, my daughter," replied the confessor; "but it is natural to desire, whilst one is living in a country, to gain some insight into its institutions, and the established religion necessarily presents itself first."

"I should be glad," said Margaret in a tone of simple earnestness which had often caught the Countess's attention, contrasting peculiarly with her superiority of talent,—"I should like to hear any

one else talk to you about it; but I am so very ignorant, I am afraid."

"Yet you have said what I have heard others say continually," replied Father Andrea. "It may be my own obtuseness which prevents me from perceiving the true strength of your position. Antiquity and law, you say, you have on your side?"

"Yes," replied Margaret, recovering herself a little; "and more than that, Episcopacy, we know, was the system of government of the primitive Church."

"Undoubtedly; it is a fact acknowledged by the whole Christian world. But I think you would find as an argument against you, that different ages and different countries require different forms of government."

"Still," said Margaret, not clearly perceiving the ground upon which she stood, and anxious to fortify it at all hazards, "the religion which is pronounced by the law of the land to be the best, and which has been upheld for centuries, must stand upon higher ground than any other.

Father Andrea paused: "You will think me very captious," he said, after a moment's thought; "but the law pronounces Presbyterianism to be the best religion for Scotland, and I have heard many members of the Establishment in England say that they should think it their duty to attend the services of the kirk, I believe it is called."

"Yes, I don't know, I never thought about it," replied Margaret, looking distressed.

"Then the two forms of religion are on an equality?" said Father Andrea.

Margaret could not at the instant say they were not. The Countess who had been listening attentively again interposed: "Father, indeed you are hard upon Miss Percival; you forget how much early

association and habit must have accustomed her to reverence the English Church."

"The English Establishment, my daughter," said the confessor, with marked emphasis. "No, indeed, I do not; I can honour and appreciate the attachment to forms which we have reverenced from childhood. If Miss Percival were a Presbyterian, doubtless her affections would be as strongly enlisted on the side of the kirk."

"No, believe me," exclaimed Margaret; "that could never be. My taste would always prefer the services of the Church of England. I cannot endure extempore prayers and preachings."

"But if you had always heard them," said the Countess, "you would probably think differently."

Margaret shook her head: "I could have no zeal for such a church," she said. "I can scarcely imagine its inspiring any."

"That was not the feeling of the Covenanters," observed Father Andrea.

"Nor of the Puritans," continued Beatrice.

"They were Independents, principally," said Margaret.

"Independents, fifth-monarchy men, whatever you call them," remarked the Confessor, "still they all stand upon the same ground. They fought, and fought vigorously, for that which they believed to be truth."

"Yes," said Margaret thoughtfully: "one must acknowledge that."

"And there were martyrs amongst them," continued Father Andrea. "Milton would have been a martyr if he had been brought to the trial."

Margaret smiled, and answered, "If I am ever converted to puritanism, the world will scarcely believe it was through your means."

Father Andrea did not make a direct reply, but

taking up the volume of the Paradise Lost, began to remark upon the peculiarities of the style, which to a foreigner rendered it very difficult, though to him, he said, it might be less so than to many, as he had so long been in the habit of reading and speaking English, that it seemed almost as familiar as his native tongue. The Countess was interested in his observations. He was little in the habit of conversing upon any subject except those immediately connected with his Church; and Margaret, who at first had been vexed at his presence, as being an interruption to the pleasure she had anticipated with the Countess, found herself by degrees, in the act of giving explanations, they might almost have been called instructions, to the reserved, cold mannered Romish priest, whom she had before so much dreaded. Beatrice looked round occasionally for Lucia, and was glad that she was engaged for the afternoon. When she was present there was always a certain degree of restraint in her intercourse with Margaret, for the Italian jealousy though it slumbered was by no means dead, and the least incautiousness might reawaken it. Several times, in the course of the conversation, the Countess was upon the point of mentioning her projected absence; but she was stopped by the hope that after all it might not be necessary. Father Andrea however alluded it, as Margaret rose to depart.—"If I had the prospect of remaining here during the winter," he said, "I should hope in time to master all the difficulties of your great poet."

Margaret looked up in surprise. "I was trying to forget, father," said the Countess, half reproachfully. "There is no need to speak of parting to-day, but it is true that I must leave Henningsley for the winter, before another fortnight is over." A sensation of faintness was at Margaret's heart, and then it

throbbed quickly. The Countess held her hand without speaking. Margaret felt ashamed of her own weakness. She struggled against it, but in vain. Her eyes glistened and her lips quivered. Father Andrea as he turned away cast on her a glance rapid but penetrating, which seemed as if it would have read her inmost thoughts.

"We shall not forget each other," said the Countess.

Margaret's answer was inarticulate, but the Countess's hand was clasped within hers, and the silent pressure spoke the warmtlr of their mutual affection. Father Andrea opened the door, and said in a tone of less seriousness than usual —"We are friends, Miss Percival, even though I may think more highly of the Puritan poet than you would deem desirable."

Margaret smiled.

"Friends always," he continued, as he shook hands; "for ever, we may hope." The last words were earnest, even paternal; and Margaret was touched by them. They parted cordially; and Father Andrea returned to the Countess with an expression of satisfaction in his face.

"Father, I am puzzled," exclaimed Beatrice; "completely puzzled. What have you been doing?"

"Laying the first stone of our future edifice," he replied.

"But by upholding Puritanism?"

"Nay, my daughter, you must recollect, we are not to build upon unoccupied ground; our first object must be to destroy that which already cumbers it."

"Addition seems a strange mode of destruction," said the Countess.

"Think of this," replied Father Andrea. "There is no principle more utterly fallacious, than that

which would make truth consist in liberty of opinion. It is proved to be false, because the moment you attempt to put it in practice it ceases to exist. The wildest supporters of perfect equality and freedom demonstrate the fact by the intolerance which they show to all who differ from them: the demagogues of the French Revolution, for instance. If this is true in politics, still more is it true in religion. Atheism itself becomes a system of dogmas. The first step is to deny the being of a God; the second, to set up the goddess of reason in His stead. Now to apply this principle to the present case, you will find amongst Protestant sects as much exclusiveness as they complain of in the one true Church. The Establishment in England sets itself above all others for one reason; the Establishment in Scotland for another; Independents for another; Baptists for another; even Unitarianism claims to have the peculiar exercise of reason. Miss Percival trusts what she calls her Church, because it has a claim to some antiquity, and suits her taste; but if you can bring her to see that Dissenters have an equal claim to her respect, the prestige, for it is nothing more, which now makes the Establishment venerable, will cease; she will be driven from her position."

"I do not quite see this, father," said the Countess; "and do not call me presuming, it seems a very long way to go before reaching our point."

"Like other things, my daughter, long in the beginning, and short in the end. You do not think a mind like Miss Percival's can rest happy in the belief that truth exists nowhere?"

"No, indeed; but does such a belief follow from her seeing the good in other systems?"

"Yes, if she has no firmer ground to stand upon than an equality of good in her own. Episcopacy is established, but so is Presbyterianism; Episco-

pacy has its zealous defenders, so have all the other forms of government; Episcopacy has its martyrs, so have they; by degrees, notwithstanding their wide differences, all will appear alike. Now, no mind capable of any thought, and really earnest like hers, can long endure this absence of positive truth; to say nothing of the pride which often mingles with our purest motives, and makes us long for superiority."

Beatrice was thoughtful; at length she said: "When you have brought her to own that all are equal, father, what will be the consequence?"

"She will immediately seek for something beyond; for that which is only to be found in the Catholic Church: a divine appointment, and an external authority."

"You are too deep for me, father," said the Countess, with a faint smile; "I should have proceeded much more simply."

"And so have defeated your own purpose. If you alarm her, she is lost. You, educated in Italy, can have no idea of the strength of prejudice which exists in England against the true faith."

"But the English Establishment does assert something of a divine right and an external authority," said the Countess.

"Yes, it asserts; but what is assertion against facts which pass before our eyes? How can Miss Percival discover any power in the system as it is exhibited in this village? What is its working, even in its best form, compared with the gigantic efforts of the Catholic Church? Besides, you see that she scarcely knows the existence of a claim to divine right. Her arguments were based upon law, antiquity, and taste—all utterly futile."

"And why futile, father?"

"Because, to found any religion upon law is to

substitute a temporal for a spiritual authority. To rest it upon antiquity makes it merely a question of private judgment as to whether our ancestors were wiser than ourselves; to-day we think they were, to-morrow we may determine they were not. And with regard to taste, if Miss Percival is ever converted from her fatal errors, it will be in a great measure, humanly speaking, by her refinement of taste. She will easily be made to acknowledge the infinite superiority of our magnificent ceremonies, compared with her own cold worship. First shake her faith in her Church, and then appeal to her feelings, and appeal to her taste, and the work is accomplished."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Father Andrea was right. Even with the Countess's last look, and the mingled tenderness and sadness of her parting words still resting on her memory, Margaret left Henningsley with seeds of uneasiness in her mind, more deeply rooted than any which the prospect of an earthly change could implant. The Countess might be absent for a while, but it was greater happiness to believe that her affection had been awakened, than it was sorrow to fear the being deprived of her society. Such at least was Margaret's first feeling, though when she approached her home, and all its anxieties, those caused by her brother especially, were recalled, a sense of desolation stole over her, and the transitoriness of earthly pleasures made her spirits sink almost to the state of depression which a few months before had rendered her existence "flat, stale, and unprofitable." In such a mood Margaret had learnt there was but one comfort — religion; active, humble, self-denying, and full of a child-like faith; and it was this comfort which Father Andrea's words had shaken. Margaret had never said to herself that she was working for the English Church; when her uncle had put forward the idea as a duty, she had found it too difficult for her reason, and she thought that she had taken a wider view of Christianity, but it was not so. How many hundreds are there at this moment in England, who like her have unconsciously twined their affections

around the Church of their fathers, and who start back from the first weapon of offence which assails it, not because they have any deep appreciation of its inestimable worth, but because they have associated with it the recollections of by-gone days and of affections which death has severed; who love to dwell upon the material building, with the old fantastic monument which attracted their childish admiration, or to kneel again in fancy in the corner of the large cumbersome pew, into which they were first brought to offer their public devotions; who delight to fill the vacant seats with the forms of friends and companions, parents, brothers, sisters, or to recall the sense of secrecy and romance with which the privileged spot was invested, when the curtain was closely drawn around, and the voice of the preacher sounded amongst the heavy pillars, less like a call to battle with a deadly foe, than the soft murmur of gentle admonition. They are prejudices hallowed and venerable, and they may not be lightly disturbed; but in the fierce contest with the claims of an opposing Church, they will slip from our grasp, and leave us helpless and unresisting, a prey to the first asserter of high spiritual power; whether, as in the case of dissent, supposed to be derived immediately from Heaven; or in that of Romanism, to have been transmitted through long ages from the traditions of the Apostles. It was not the spiritual church which Margaret loved, but the old ivy-mantled tower and her own peculiar seat, and the familiar faces which appeared Sunday after Sunday in their fixed places in the adjoining pews; and the words of the prayers were valued, not because they were a precious inheritance from the primitive ages of Christianity, but because they harmonized with a pure taste, and expressed fully and forcibly the needs which in her own language she would have found

it difficult to utter. A change seemed suddenly to have come upon all these things, — "a glory had passed from them." The Church had been depreciated, — it had been called a sect. Margaret asked herself why she had thought so highly of it, and she could give no more satisfactory reply now than she had done when questioned by Father Andrea. It was the most respectable communion, certainly; all her own friends belonged to it. It was supported, (that was the term which she had often heard,) by the nobility and gentry in England; but to what did all this amount? In the eyes of a foreigner, a Romanist, she saw that it was nothing. Margaret cast her eye upon the red brick building, the excrescence which the niggardliness of a century before had attached to the venerable tower, and she no longer wondered. The edifice was the visible symbol of her faith. The illusion with which her childish recollections had hallowed it were dissipated, and it stood before her in its native deformity. She thought of the weed-covered churchyard, the neglected poor, the indolent rector; and she was ashamed, — not ashamed of the human sins and ignorance which had caused such a state of things to grow up unchecked; but of the Church which in her prayers and her ordinances, in her rubrics and her canons, provides for the solemn celebration of public services; enjoins upon her children a life of humility, devotion, penitence, and self-denial; and would train them up in the way in which they should go, that so, when they are old, they may not depart from it. Margaret remembered St. Ouen, the first Romanist church she had ever seen. Reason told her that it was a false argument which would lead her to judge of the merits of a religious system from the beauty of the temples in which its worship was offered; but Margaret was not then in a disposition to reason. Her fancy had

been awakened ; and, without knowing it, she was prejudiced in favour of any belief held by the Countess Novera. She could not imagine her a Protestant. The sobriety of the English ritual seemed little to assimilate with her bursts of enthusiasm, and the graceful dignity of her manner and the elegance of her appearance suited much better with the splendour of St. Ouen, than with the poverty of the old church of Deering. Protestantism, it seemed certain, could have no attractions in her eyes ; and though her regard for Margaret's prepossessions had prevented her from openly declaring her opinion, it was evident that she, as well as Father Andrea, could perceive little difference between the English Church and Puritanism. Margaret indulged in a moody discontent for the remainder of her walk. She sent the children from her, and at last created a day dream of a life at Henningsley, with the Countess as her friend and guide. And what was to be done with the religion? For that moment it was set aside: she had no thought of converting the Countess, and she had no fear lest the Countess should convert her. It was all very well to look at Romanism at a distance, and admire it; but there were grievous errors which never could be received. She could not worship the Virgin, and pray to saints, and put faith in relics: all these were absurdities, therefore safe-guards. She might go as near as she liked to the forbidden fruit: she might look at, examine, touch ; but she had been told that the taste was bitter, and therefore she need not dread the temptation of plucking it. If Margaret had been accused of self-confidence, she would have rejected the accusation with sincerity. If the trial had come in another form, if it had been an open sin which thus assailed her with its lures, she would have said at once that she

could not trust herself; that to dwell even upon a crime which may be repugnant to our nature, from which we should at first turn with loathing, may in time lead us to destruction; and she would have shut her eyes and closed her ears in distrust, not of the power of truth and holiness, but of her own inherent weakness. But the present temptation came before her in another shape, as an angel of light rather than of darkness. It appealed to her longing after perfection, to her belief of what the worship of God might and ought to be; and it did not invite her to find rest in another communion, it only opened her eyes to the glaring defects of her own. Before she reached home, Mr. Sutherland's idea of working for the English Church seemed more impracticable than ever. If the existence of the Church had hitherto appeared an abstraction which her mind could not grasp, now it had melted away entirely, lost amid the heterogeneous medley of opinions which she had been accustomed to include in the term Protestantism.

The first person who greeted Margaret's eye when she entered the house was her mother, — a frown on her forehead, a watch in her hand.

"Twenty minutes after the time, Margaret; what have you been doing? You will tire the children to death, if you take them for such long walks."

"I was at Henningsley, mamma," said Margaret, knowing by experience that there was a magic in the name.

"At Henningsley, were you? — did you see the Countess?"

"Yes, I was with her some time; and the children played in the garden."

"Oh!" — Mrs. Percival could still almost have found it in her heart to administer a reproof.

"You ought to have been here before, though," she said; "you have been wanted."

"By Craven?" enquired Margaret, attempting to smile.

"Yes, he told me he had seen you; and he seemed disappointed that you should have staid away from him so long, when he had but just arrived."

Margaret made an excuse, and went to her room. Why was it more difficult to bear with complaint now than it was usually? Why did Craven's injustice and thoughtlessness particularly strike her? Why did she think of the morrow, and Agatha's return, with increased pain? It was the world within, not the world without, which was in fault. But a short space was left before the dinner bell would ring. Margaret had intended to dedicate it to self-recollection and prayer, for experience had taught her that the devotion which is exercised only at the beginning and the close of the day will insensibly become weaker and weaker as it struggles against the manifold trials of domestic life. One of her strictest rules had been to give up some time in the middle of the day to private prayer, and nothing had been hitherto allowed to interfere with the duty. If it was not performed at one hour, it was at another. The fixed time was between luncheon and the children's walk; but this day it had been postponed by a morning visitor, and now Margaret wished to recall her scattered thoughts, and, as it were, re-tune her mind before going down to dinner. If she did not, the presence of Craven, and her mother's censures or questions, would in all probability put the finishing-stroke to her unhappiness, by making her feel that her temper was not yet under subjection, nor her will resigned to the circumstances of her earthly lot. But Margaret's unsettled thoughts followed her even into the presence of

her Maker. She had compiled for herself from the Church services and the Psalms a short form which she had been accustomed to make the frame-work of her prayers. It had been selected from suiting her own especial wants, and hitherto it had satisfied her; but a criticising spirit had taken possession of her, and when her book was opened the first thought which arose was whether the prayers were as good as she had imagined; whether Father Andrea and the Countess would admire them. Margaret was shocked at herself, but not because this was not the manner in which she ought to look at the Church prayers, but because the idea came at a wrong moment. She turned from it immediately, and when her devotions were ended she could acknowledge with satisfaction that nothing better could be desired than the "form of sound words" which she had uttered from the heart, expanding and concentrating them as occasion required, so as to embody the particular necessities of the moment. She dressed herself and went down stairs happier than before, more satisfied that the prayers of the Church were not merely equal, but far superior to any extempore effusions, however sincere and eloquent. She thought that she would take a prayer-book with her the next time she went to Henningsley, that she might explain it to the Countess, and excite her admiration also. Margaret had no notion of error in thus praising instead of reverencing, for she did not see that she was placing herself in a wrong position with regard to the Church; the position of a child, who obeys his parents because they are kind to him, and try to teach him what is right, and not because the imperative law of God has said, "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." It would have been hard to

blame Margaret for such a spirit, for it was the natural consequence of the view which she had learnt to take of the authority of the Church, deriving it from human power, not divine. That which man has created, man may alter and destroy; and the same legislature which fixed upon Presbyterianism as the best religion for Scotland, might also, if it saw fit, establish any other species of dissent as the most desirable for England. Margaret's affections might in that case still cling to the Church of her fathers, but there could be no law to enforce an adherence to it. She would support, admire, and whilst she supported and admired she would obey; but the obedience due to the object of our own choice is but another word for obedience to our individual will; and the Bible does not say, "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, because they are good and holy, and approve themselves to our conscience;" but it gives the injunction broadly, strongly, without definition or limitation, to teach us that subjection to law, fixed and unchangeable, is the condition of man's existence in happiness here, as it must be of his hopes of blessedness hereafter.

Margaret had no opportunity of conversing with her brother before dinner, and afterwards Dr. Percival engrossed him entirely; making him recount his Irish adventures and disasters, — the attacks of the peasantry, and the repulses of the soldiers. The descriptions were given with infinite humour, and Margaret laughed heartily; whilst Dr. Percival seemed to have forgotten all his son's misdemeanours in delight at his cleverness.

"Well! Craven," he exclaimed, as he stretched himself in his chair, wearied at length with the pleasure of listening; "people may say what they will, but the army is a fine field for a young man.

It throws him into the world upon his own resources. I am not sure that George would not have done much better if he had gone to Sandhurst. The Church is but plodding up-hill work at the best."

"George is very firm to his choice," observed Margaret. "He told me in the summer that the more he thought of it the more he liked it."

"George is a strange fellow," said Dr. Percival, "not a bit like any of you. I'll tell you, Margaret, the only person he ever reminds me of, your uncle Henry."

"Does he?" said Margaret; "then I am sure we ought all to be contented."

"Yes, he has just the same quiet humour and odd way of looking at things."

Margaret would have preferred hearing that he had just the same piety and zeal, but this, perhaps, was not to be expected in a boy.

"The worst of the Church," continued Dr. Percival, "is, that it requires such a long preparation. One is obliged to spend a fortune before a young man can take his degree, and when he has done it, there is little prospect for him, beyond starving for life upon ninety or a hundred a year."

"Our rich Church!" said Margaret.

"Our rich Church, you may well say;" replied her father; "but people's eyes are beginning to be opened to that falsehood. Where would the Church be, if it were not for the private fortunes which are brought into it?"

"Where George will be one of these days," said Craven, "in a great mess."

"Poor George!" half sighed Dr. Percival. "Well, it is his own doing. I have warned him again and again that he is making a mistake, that he must not expect any help from me."

Craven thought that they were treading upon dangerous ground. He took up a book, and hoped his father would go to sleep, but Dr. Percival was roused by his subject.

"What was that you heard about George, from some one who had been at Eton, Craven?"

"Merely that he was doing very well, sir: likely to cut a figure."

"That is the only thing which satisfies me as to his profession," continued Dr. Percival. "I have thought sometimes lately, whether it would not have been wiser to have taken his godfather's offer, and put him into a merchant's house."

"What! George, papa?" exclaimed Margaret.

"George!" echoed Mrs. Percival, who caught the last sentence, as she came into the room from paying her last maternal visit to the children.

"Yes, George:" repeated Dr. Percival, sharply; and sitting upright in his chair, he cast an irritable glance around him.

"You don't think Mr. Dampier would take me instead, sir, do you?" said Craven.

"Not quite, Craven: you are not exactly the stuff of which a merchant's clerk should be made; but as to your mother and Margaret exclaiming in such a fuss about George, it is absurd. A steady, well conducted boy, he would gain a fortune in no time."

"A good hit at me," whispered Craven to his sister.

"But his talents," said Mrs. Percival: "really my dear, you forget sometimes what your children are worth."

"Shall I tell you, Julia?" said Dr. Percival; "worth nothing — not a penny; that is what I want you all to learn. It is very well to live in comfort now, but if anything happens to me, ever

one must take care of himself; and so George was a foolish fellow for refusing Dampier's offer, and insisting upon taking to the Church; and I was a foolish father for allowing it."

"I don't think you will regret it, dear papa," said Margaret gently.

"Very possibly not, Margaret, if he does well, and is happy; but the thing which annoys me is that you should not all see that money is of importance."

Craven looked his thoughts of amusement, that any teaching should be deemed requisite on such subject, but he did not venture to utter them. Mrs. Percival waited till she heard the first snore, which was not long in giving notice that sleep had gained its usual victory over Dr. Percival's senses, and then turning to Margaret, she said, "Your father is so strange upon that point; he thinks that I have not the same care for my children's interests that he has."

"He is worried just now, I suspect," said Margaret.

"Yes, a little. There came in a long bill this afternoon, which I was obliged to give him, from the coachmaker's. I can't think why it was not kept till Christmas."

"Let us have a little music, Margaret," said Craven, abruptly.

"Papa must have known it was going on," observed Margaret, replying to her mother.

"Oh, yes, of course he did; and he can settle it without any difficulty; but it is his way just for the time. He forgets that every thing is doing well, and that Agatha is off his hands."

"And on Colonel Clive's;" said Craven.

"She can be no burden to any one, Craven. A prince might be proud of her for his wife."

"The thing I want to know," continued Craven, "is, whether the Colonel's affection extends to the whole family. Does he patronize you, Margaret?"

"Patronize! my dear boy, what a word!" interrupted Mrs. Percival. "Who could think of patronizing Margaret?"

"Why, no one, I must own;" said Craven, surveying his sister with an air of mingled criticism and pleasure. "There is a something about Margaret, I confess, which would not attract patronage. A sort of sevenfold fence — of — what is it? — reserve?"

"Nonsense, Craven," said Margaret, laughing: "you know I never allow personal observations. What shall I play to you?"

"It is a great deal too late for music to-night," observed Mrs. Percival; "if your brother wishes for it you must begin earlier another evening."

"Only one thing,—just one;" said Craven, imploringly.

"No, my dear, I can't indeed. The servants will be kept up.—Margaret, I wish you would take these books into the library."

Margaret did as she was told, and was carrying off a pile of books in one hand, and a candlestick in the other, when Craven followed, offering to help her.

"I can't stand this much longer," he said, throwing down the volumes upon the library table, and closing the door. "Margaret, why does my mother fidget so?"

"It is a mere nothing," said Margaret. "She likes every one to be in bed in good time, that's all."

"But it is not in this only; it is in every thing. Not to be allowed to have a little music if one likes

it! Really, if one was a baby in arms, one couldn't be treated worse."

"If you were a baby in arms you would probably bear it better," said Margaret, smiling; "but seriously, it is very unjust in you, Craven. Suppose in a large family each person was allowed to have his own way, what would become of comfort?"

"What is comfort without freedom? I wish, Margaret — yes, I wish with all my heart I belonged to any family but this."

Craven seated himself at his ease in an arm chair, and Margaret was obliged to remind him that their mother would miss them, and come to find them.

"But, Margaret, I can't be ruled in this way; I must have some talk with you to-night. You are the only rational being in the house."

"Then you must come to my room, there is no other place."

Craven rushed up the stairs hastily, wished his mother good night, and before Margaret had been told the plans for the next day, which were always enumerated over night, he had taken possession of her room, and was comfortably established, in expectation of a midnight talk.

"Now, Craven! acknowledge you are very foolish," said Margaret, lightly, as she rested herself against the arm of his chair, and pushing back the hair which clustered over his handsome forehead, gave him a kiss.

"'Foolish' may mean many things, Margaret," replied Craven, drawing a long breath. "Perhaps I am more foolish than you would give me credit for."

"I did not mean to recall old grievances," said Margaret. "All I meant was about mamma."

"Never mind her: I should not, if it were not for other things."

"I thought that was all," observed Margaret in a voice of sadness; "but how can I help you in the other things?"

"That is the question. I don't think you can."

"Let me hear them," said Margaret.

"No, it will be no good." He was silent for an instant, and then exclaimed: "I would give the world if you were Agatha!"

"Don't wish that," said Margaret, very gravely.

"Well! not Agatha; but any one else with a good handsome fortune. You would help me out of a difficulty, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, of course, in a moment; if it were right."

"Leave the right; I am not in a humour for it."

"But you must be, dear Craven; or I must not talk to you."

Craven looked at her steadily, and said, "Margaret, I think you are grown very old."

"Eighteen my last birth-day; that will be nineteen in two months' time. It is advancing certainly."

"And I am four-and-twenty: our ages ought to be reversed."

"Women always are older than men," said Margaret.

"Six years' difference!" continued her brother, speaking slowly; "but somehow, Margaret, I have rather a respect for you." He jumped up from his chair, and walking to the table, began to turn over the books which were scattered upon it. Then, bursting into a laugh, he exclaimed, "By the by, you have never told me what sort of appearance our venerable brother-in-law made when he led his fair bride to the altar?"

Margaret was too much accustomed to his caprice of manner to be at all startled by this change. "I am not going to talk about Colonel Clive, Craven,"

she said quietly, but with great firmness. "It is late, and if you have nothing more to say to me, you must leave me."

"Say!" he repeated; "I have things to say which would occupy half the night."

"Then they must be left till to-morrow," said Margaret, opening the door for him to pass; but he closed it again quickly, and as if inspired with a sudden resolution, exclaimed, "The truth is, Margaret,—it's no use trying to hide it,—I'm in a desperate plight."

Margaret was about to answer—"So soon! again!" but she stopped in time, or his fit of candour might have passed, not to return.

"That paltry three hundred!" he continued with vehemence: "It was a drop of water in the ocean!" and then he added, hurrying over the words,—"Fifteen! what do you say to fifteen, Margaret?"

Poor Margaret gasped for breath. Craven put on an air of indifference, but the penetrating eye of affection could see that there was remorse beneath. Margaret sat down in the nearest chair, her face was flushed, but she kept a steadfast control over her manner, and without expressing surprise or distress, said, "And how have you managed to spend so large a sum?"

"It was not spent, exactly," he replied, with some hesitation; "but after all, there is nothing so very monstrous. Many men, I know, run away with three times the amount."

"All things by comparison," said Margaret, trying hard not to show her annoyance at his attempted excuses. "One thing is certain, Craven, it is a very large debt for my father to pay."

"There's the rub, Margaret. It strikes me that

his excellency is not quite in the humour to hear it mentioned."

"No, indeed," said Margaret. "Did you come over with any idea of finding that he was?"

"Why, not precisely. I came — I don't know why I came. Affairs were at a desperate pass, and I was desperate too."

"Yet it is strange," said Margaret, after a little thought. "How has it gone, Craven?"

"Gone! I wish it was gone; but it is to come!"

"Well, but how? What have you been doing?"

"Oh! as to that, there is no use in inquiring. Put you into the army, and you would soon understand how money goes."

"Yet I should like to be told," said Margaret, in a voice of great gentleness; "because, if I am to help you in any way, (though I can't imagine how,) it may be necessary."

"It is merely doing what every one else does; what one is forced into, indeed," said Craven. "But, Margaret, I will tell you why I came. I had a sort of wild notion that perhaps Agatha could assist me. She must be rolling in riches now, and she is a good-natured girl."

"A very vain hope," said Margaret, sadly. "You don't imagine, do you, that Colonel Clive has made over all his property to her?"

"No, I was not fool enough for that; but I had a fancy that she must have something at command, — a few hundreds; and that would do just for the present. The duns I don't mind, it is only serving them as one has done fifty times before."

"Then if you do not fear the duns, what do you fear?" asked Margaret.

"Trust a woman's curiosity," he exclaimed, with something of his former lightness of manner. "I

suppose you can't understand what a debt of honour means?"

"Gaming!" exclaimed Margaret, in a tone of horror.

Craven saw the expression of her countenance: it was a miserable reproach for his conduct. "Don't fuss yourself so, Margaret, love," he said, drawing near to her; "it is only because you are not in the habit of hearing of these things: no one else thinks about them."

"But, Craven, my father! what will he say?"

Craven struck his forehead, and turned away. "I'm a horrid coward, Margaret," he said, after a pause; "I could face a cannon ball sooner than my father's look."

"So could I," said Margaret.

Her brother seemed surprised by the avowal. "I thought you never feared any thing, Margaret. I have rested upon that."

Margaret sighed deeply. "There is enough to make one fear now," she said.

"Not you; you have no cause for it. But are you sure that Agatha can do nothing?"

"Positively certain. She has a handsome allowance, yet only sufficient for her position; and every thing else is settled upon her after Colonel Clive's death. The estate, you know, can never be hers."

"And she has no ready money? nothing to help one at an emergency?"

"Nothing whatever."

Craven stood considering, and at length said; "It is absurd in my father to pretend he can't help. If I had his fortune, I would live like a prince." Margaret thought that he seemed inclined to do so without it, but she let him go on free from interruption. "It is the telling, that I am afraid of," he said.

"You may write."

"And not be answered: when the three hundred were sent me, my father vowed he would never listen to another application."

"Yet there is no other hope," observed Margaret. "He must listen to you if you speak to him."

"I can't, Margaret. You may as well tell me to do the most unheard of impossibility. I could die sooner."

"Then, my dear Craven, what can you do?"

"As I have before," he answered vehemently: "go back and stake my last farthing, and run my chance. I meant," he added, with a quieter tone, "to have broken off. I said I would, if I could be freed; but there is no other alternative."

"Did you really say it?" asked Margaret; and her face was lighted up with hope. "Could you promise it, Craven?"

"I would promise any thing to be out of this fearful mess. I would work as a galley slave — starve in a dungeon, rather than bear what I have borne lately."

"But," said Margaret, "you have only to say this to my father. He is quick, but it is soon over. He will make any sacrifice to gain such a point as your steadiness."

"Margaret, I cannot. I tell you in plain words, that if the affair is left to me it must end—I don't know—I can't think how it will end," he added, wildly: "but this I know, that I will be off to Ireland to-morrow, and have one more chance."

Margaret was extremely frightened. She was so young, and so unused to any scenes of the kind, that she could not attempt to soothe or reason with her brother; and Craven, who, like most extrava-

gant persons, was in his heart selfish, saw that he had reached the point at which he aimed.

"If it were left to you, Margaret," he said, "to break the business, there might be a chance of success."

"Oh, Craven! I could not: what would become of me?"

"There can be no blame attached to you for it," he replied.

"No blame! but when my father is angry, it is so dreadful; and you away—and mamma unhappy —how could I ever bear it?"

"Then I am disappointed in you, Margaret. I looked upon you as my only help. I came over purposely to see you, because you had said I must not write."

Poor Margaret leant her head against the arm of the chair, and began to think. It seemed so selfish in Craven. He knew quite well that the brunt of the storm would, in such a case, fall upon her. He would be away, safe from irritation and complaints and moody looks. He did not know how a woman's life at home is rendered miserable by the actions of those who are absent, enjoying themselves—if it may be called enjoyment — amidst the follies of the world. If he were to speak himself, he, who had done the wrong, would bear the punishment. Yet there was truth in his assertion, that no blame could be attributed to her; and if the thought of the disclosure were so painful to the innocent, it must be still more so to the guilty. Margaret's conscience reproached her for unkindness and cowardice, the very faults of which she had been complaining secretly in her brother. Even if he were to make the confession himself, the pain it would cause her parents must, she knew, be shared by her, and whether she had to bear a little more or

less was perhaps of trifling consequence. The smile, with which she looked up into Craven's face as she answered, spoke more keenly to his selfishness than any reproach:

"If you will promise me one thing, Craven, I will undertake to tell papa."

Craven could not return the smile; he felt his own weakness, and Margaret's strength; but he poured forth a torrent of thanks, which was only stopped by his sister's saying in a firmer tone:

"You must promise that you will never touch dice, or a card, or gamble in any way; and you must empower me to say so to papa. If you will not do this I cannot undertake any thing."

"Oh, Margaret!" exclaimed Craven, with his usual impetuousness, "how can you doubt that I will promise that, or any thing else you require? I will give it all up — you shall never hear a word against me; I will keep strictly within my income. Save me from this, and do not let me hear from my father till he is softened, and believe me you shall never regret it."

"Then I must have a list of all — a strict account," said Margaret.

"All — every penny. Stop, I can give you the great items now."

He seized a pen, and scratched a few figures, which were tossed over to Margaret with a careless air, not at all suited to the occasion. Margaret read insecurity in the trifling action; she saw that she had been hasty. Craven had promised without thought, how would such a promise stand the fierce trial of the world?

"Dear Craven," she said, "if it were not so late, and if it were my place, I could find it in my heart to say so many things to you. But you would

not listen to them from me: Uncle Henry should talk to you."

"I would rather hear you, Margaret," he replied, "than all the Uncle Henrys in the world."

"I can write lectures better than I can give them," said Margaret. "I shall send you one when you go back."

"That will be very soon," answered Craven; "I can't stay here, with this weight upon me."

"But you will not go sooner than you can help, for mamma's sake."

"I don't know; I shall like to see Agatha and the Colonel, just as one would like to see specimens from the Zoological Gardens."

Margaret did not laugh; and Craven, kissing her several times, and declaring that she was the best sister that a brother was ever blest with, bade her good night.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Margaret was too tired to be wakeful, and notwithstanding her anxieties, her conscience was at ease, and there was no indecision burdening her mind. The rest which she enjoyed was indeed heavy and unrefreshing, but she rose to her usual duties with an energy damped only by the chilling remembrance of Father Andrea's conversation. It was a holiday; Mrs. Percival had insisted upon it; and Margaret had neither the will nor the wish to oppose, though she could not tell why it was necessary, as Agatha and Colonel Clive were to arrive at Ashington, not the Grove; and Agatha had particularly mentioned that they were likely to be uncertain in their movements, so that no one was to be there to meet her. But the bustle of Mrs. Percival's mind always exhibited itself in her actions, and infused itself into her household. Margaret thought of Henningsley; the repose of the Countess's manner was a characteristic which struck her anew whenever she was in her company. It was not reserve, nor indifference, nor was it the easy polish of one accustomed to the refinements of the highest circles of society. It was something above and beyond all these — the repose of a mind calmed by suffering, superior to petty foibles—a mind full of lofty thoughts, and passing through the turmoil of life untouched by the movements which excite and agitate the mass of mankind. A charm there might be also in the dignity of one who had few earthly needs, and threw the burden of providing for them upon

others. The Countess was not harassed by trials of temper; she had "no thought for the morrow," because in a worldly sense the morrow was provided for. All things at Henningsley were simple and undisturbed: orders were given and executed; wishes were expressed and gratified; not, however, that they were selfish and luxurious; for if they had been, Margaret would have been pained. But the life at the Grove, how different it was! — active, eager, conflicting, a world in itself, and many of those who took part in it undisciplined in spirit, and uncongenial. Margaret was full of energy, but it was energy refined and toned down. She had undergone a change even outwardly since the ideas first instilled by her uncle had actually guided her conduct. Her actions were slower, more considerate; her words were fewer; there was an air of self-recollection about her, which, perhaps, is one of the most powerful, though unconscious, means of influence exerted by the higher order of minds. There was nothing of this in her mother; nothing in her father; nothing, as yet, in the children. They seemed rushing through the world, catching at every passing object; and unmindful of that deep, dark current of time, which, whilst they were dreaming of days and hours, was bearing them on swifter than thought could measure to the unseen world, and in which, in a few short years, all human hopes must be engulphed. A home, a quiet, happy, peaceful home, such as is sometimes believed to be the natural inheritance of women, was not Margaret's, and it is the blessing of the few, not of the many. There is seldom any thing more delusive than the tranquillity which men harassed by business are apt to envy in a well-regulated family circle. They see every thing outwardly smooth—no sighs, no complaints; or if there is an occasional cloud,

they are too little acquainted with the different shades of character, even of those most nearly connected with them, to be aware of it. And as it is in the short intervals which they are allowed to pass with those they love, so they imagine it must be always. They think that where the strife of the world is not heard, there every other strife must be excluded. And yet in that orderly household, in that cheerful society, there is fought, hour by hour, the great battle of good and evil, as constantly, as vigorously, with as many hopes, and fears, and alternations of victory and defeat, as when men meet in the senate-house or the market, or mingle in the most crowded haunts of their fellow-beings. There were some who arose to scenes of anxiety on that morning, and thought of Margaret Percival as possessed of every blessing which could render existence enjoyable. Parents in prosperity, and in a position rather above what the circumstances of birth and fortune seemed naturally to indicate; a sister returning from a wedding tour to enter upon a life of luxury; duties in her home sufficient for rational occupation; talents which every one admired; — who could want more? Margaret did not; she knew and valued her advantages, and yet her first thought when she opened her eye to the light of the lovely autumn day, was, that life was full of care. The thought must come to all sooner or later; and however little we may be inclined to believe it, it is happy for us when the truth is understood in the days of our youth; for we have not then learnt to rest upon our own strength, we have not exhausted our higher energies in the enervating pursuits of the world, nor bartered the precious gifts of our spiritual inheritance for the fragile toys of fame, or wealth, or pleasure. A weary length of road may at times appear to be before us, and when we enter upon

it, it may seem that there is little to cheer us, but the very infirmity of our nature will force us to seek for a support mightier than our own ; and when we can bend our knees, and fold our hands in submission, and lifting our eyes to heaven, own ourselves helpless without God's help, the weight of our burden will adjust itself precisely to our need ; and as it increases, so will the spirit within us be called forth to endure until we have at length learnt to realize the truth of the promise which can never be broken — " as thy days so shall thy strength be." Margaret was not overwhelmed by the troubles which were gathering around her ; though she knew that they betokened, not a transient storm, but the steady succession of the appointed trials which were to purify her soul for heaven. One might pass, but another would follow in its stead. The great lesson which she had then to learn was to take each by itself; not to burden to-day with the anxieties of to-morrow. She was too much in the habit of doing this. Having promised to assist her brother out of his difficulties, at a great sacrifice to her own feelings, she went through the whole scene with her father ; repeated his probable words, conjured up his look, rehearsed, beforehand, her mother's distress, and the manner in which it would be shown by increased vigilance over all her other children. She then proceeded to dwell upon the defects of Craven's character, and the miseries into which they might lead him ; a consideration which would have been extremely desirable if it had taught her merely to be more guarded over her own conduct when with him ; and to pray, that he might be kept from temptation. But it went much further, and before Margaret was drest, she had placed her brother in situations of the utmost difficulty, caused by his own folly, and had seen him fall in

each. So it was when she thought of the Countess's departure from Henningsley. She grieved over her absence as lasting, because it might be so possibly. At the present time there was no idea of her staying beyond the winter in Devonshire, but that was not sufficient for Margaret's anxious mind. This, and every other sorrow, was doubled by her imagination, and the cares of many succeeding weeks, and even years, were brought to increase those which were especially appointed for the hour; until the words "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," recurred to her memory,— and with them the lesson which they were so mercifully appointed to teach. The immediate troubles were then singled out from the rest, and Margaret repented the want of faith which had added to them so unnecessarily. Craven's face, when they met at breakfast, showed no regret, nor his manner any particular sense of his sister's good-nature. Generous, open-hearted people, as they are called, are often thoroughly selfish, and the fault is hidden not only from the world, but from themselves. It is in their private circles, amongst their relations or perhaps their intimate friends, that it is discovered. Craven Percival had the reputation of being the most liberal, good-natured fellow in existence; and he actually believed himself to be so. He spent his father's money, and imposed upon his sister's kindness; but his brother officers knew nothing of this, and as far as being reckless of expense, and willing to head any scheme of folly, may be considered to constitute liberality and good-nature, so far Craven certainly had great claims to the character he enjoyed. All this morning he was in the school-room, playing with the children, or lounging in an arm-chair, reading a novel. His life at home was generally insipid, and for that reason he seldom came there. He tried to engage Margaret

in a bantering conversation, but Margaret was busy, and in her heart provoked, and soon made her escape; though she promised to walk with him in the afternoon. The promise was given a little before luncheon, which came very opportunely for Craven's listlessness. He undertook to carve for the children, and managed at the same time to make a substantial repast. What else could an idle man do? as Margaret asked, when, after helping herself to a piece of cake and a little wine, she went to her own room. Philip was delighted at having an elder brother at home, and Mrs. Percival was proud of her handsome son, and particularly enjoyed his good spirits. She secretly wished some one would call that she might exhibit him, and looked up when the hall bell rang, expecting to be told of a visitor. But it was only Miss Debrett; and as a privileged person she was shown into the school-room. Craven received a hearty shake of the hand, which was given more to his owning the name of Percival than to any actual liking. Dislike him, Miss Debrett certainly did not; she could not absolutely be said to dislike any body, but she would rather have been out of his presence than in it. A few inquiries satisfied her that nothing had been heard of Agatha, and that, probably, nothing would be, till late in the day; and then she gave renewed attention to Craven, and congratulated Mrs. Percival with much warmth upon having him at home again, declaring he was looking particularly well, and adding that she would not repeat all the pretty things she had heard of him lately, for fear of making him blush.

"Now is that really your fear, Miss Debrett?" demanded Craven, gravely; delighting in taking every thing she said literally, and then forcing her to explain herself. "Do you really think that I am given to blushing.

"I don't know about the being given to it; you used to blush when you were a little boy."

"But since I have been a man, can you state it positively? because if you cannot, I must say you should be careful. To tell a man he blushes, is to tell him he is like a woman; and to tell him he is like a woman is just another name for saying he is a coward; and you know if an officer is a coward he deserves to be drummed out of his regiment."

Harriet laughed heartily at her brother's tirade, but poor Miss Debrett received it as it was intended she should.

"My dear Craven," she began, her mouth twitching nervously, "you must let me call you Craven, because you know I held you when you were a baby; but you can't think I meant it, not for the world. Harriet, my love, you should not laugh so loud: your brother can't hear."

"Thank you, I hear quite well," said Craven.

"Well, then! let me tell you what Major Vernon said only last week—Major Vernon of the 97th, you know him of course." Craven bowed. "He is just come from Ireland, and we met in the street, and talked about you; we did, indeed; and he said that he did not know a finer young man any where—nor a braver, no doubt, he would have said, if he had not been in a hurry."

Craven kept his countenance and his attention immovable; and, when Miss Debrett stopped, answered:

"Brave you may well say. It requires bravery, I can assure you, to live in Ireland. A dreadful country! barbarous people!"

"Ah! indeed! so I've heard. I had a cousin living there once, who was shot quite dead one day when he was not thinking about it."

"Things are no better now," said Craven: "worse one may say. We had a fierce engagement the

other day, up in a wild part amongst the mountains. All our men were drawn up, bayonets pointed, the word of command just going to be given — when the mob dispersed, yelling and screaming; the village street was crowded; two women and half a dozen children were thrown down in the scuffle; four dogs had their legs broken; and eight pigs' tails were pinched off; besides half a dozen policemen's staves knocked to atoms."

"Dreadful! dreadful!" sighed Miss Debrett.

"And besides this," continued Craven, — but Mrs. Percival interposed.

"Craven, I won't have you talk any more such rhodomontade. My dear Miss Debrett, he is laughing at us all. He likes Ireland very much, and he has a great many friends there." Craven bit his lip, and looked not very dutiful. Mrs. Percival was not partial to rhodomontade, and even her fondness for her eldest son could not induce her to bear it long. "I wanted to know about Jenkins," she said, turning to Miss Debrett. "Is she finally resolved upon leaving you?"

"What, Jenkins!" exclaimed Craven; "that piece of perfection! that phœnix of abigails! you cannot have made up your mind to part with her!"

"No, my dear, not made up my mind, but, you see, she has made up her's."

"Jenkins is going to be married," said Mrs. Percival, shortly. Then, fearing lest Craven should again ramble off, she added, "I want to know whether you have met with any one instead."

"Why, I have a good many, but then they will none of them suit; that is, one will, but I am not quite sure."

"An answer worthy of the Delphic oracle," said Craven.

"Hush, my dear; you really are too absurd. —

What do you mean, my dear Miss Debrett? Have you hired a maid instead of Jenkins?"

"No, indeed; how could you think I should do such a thing without consulting you? But the young woman who called this morning looks very neat, and is very civil; and if I had not been so flurried at hearing that Jenkins had actually fixed the day, I think she would have done for me."

"Why not take her, then?" inquired Mrs. Percival. "Children, you may say grace, and go upstairs." The grace was mumbled over in a different way from what it would have been if Margaret had been present, Mrs. Percival continuing to speak at the same time. "Why don't you take her, my dear Miss Debrett," she repeated.

"That was what I was going to talk to you about. You see there is an objection; she lives close by the lodge at Henningsley."

"A serious matter!" remarked Craven, shaking his head.

"Yes, you are right: it is very serious. As I said, she was a very tidy, civil-spoken young woman; but I had Jenkins in to see her, and Jenkins declares that she is a Papist; that is, she is not, but they say that her sister who lives in the same house is."

"Not unlikely," observed Mrs. Percival, "considering that so many of Lord de Lisle's tenants were of his faith."

"But the shocking thing is," continued Miss Debrett, "that the mother is a very excellent, good-hearted woman; she goes regularly every Sunday to the Wesleyan meeting, and one of the sons is a preacher; and another has just turned Plymouth Brother. They are a very highly religious family, all of them; but the poor girl, the sister of the one who came to me, is dying of a decline, and people say

that the Italian Countess, and the Catholic priest, have managed to see her, and turn her; and there's a thought that this girl is not right either. Now it would be so dreadful to have a Roman Catholic in the house. I shouldn't feel I was safe in my bed."

"There you are quite right: I most highly applaud your principles," exclaimed Craven; "let me have any thing but a Papist. I will just give you a slight sketch of the state of Ireland at this present time; you know they spring up like mushrooms there."

"Do they, indeed? I heard it was a horrible country."

"Two or three things I can prove to be facts," began Craven, but he did not go on, for Margaret came into the room, leading little Juliet, and Miss Debrett's attention was of course diverted to her; the state of her health, the length of her walk, the exact day when she had last seen her, ending with caresses to the child, and the production of a round box from the depths of a capacious pocket, in which lozenges and sugar-plums were always kept for the pleasure, as she said, but for the injury, as Mrs. Percival declared, of all the children in the neighbourhood. Craven was not to be diverted from his object, especially when that object was startling the nerves of a timid elderly female; and again he returned to the fearful state of the peasantry in Ireland. Margaret listened to him with more interest than usual; and when her brother perceived that he really had a sensible hearer, and that even Mrs. Percival said "hush" to Juliet, and took her upon her lap to play with the spoons and be quiet, his own satisfaction in talking increased, and he related several stories free from gross exaggeration, which in their details were very painful.

Miss Debrett lifted up her hands and eyes, and

many times ejaculated "oh!" Mrs. Percival made a point of inquiring at the end of each fact, what was his authority, and if he were quite sure that he was repeating honestly; and Margaret gave her attention to the subject from a feeling stronger than curiosity. Unhappily, Craven was not always exact in what he said; and though, in this instance, he had been particularly careful, yet the discredit attached to his stories in general still remained. All that Margaret heard was received with a lurking mistrust. It might be true, but then Craven said it, and it was well known that he would add and embellish. She was silent, however, and Craven went on. Growing bolder by success, he amplified and gave inferences as facts. Margaret had a very clear head, and she cross-examined cleverly and forced him to retract. The retractation nullified the effect of his previous assertions; and she ventured to hint at a few palliations for the crimes which he said had been committed by the people, and sanctioned by the priests; but Mrs. Percival would not hear of them; and, giving way to the impressions which had been kindled by all she had been told, expressed herself in strong terms against the people, the priests, the system, the doctrines, blending the most incongruous points, and, in her zeal against Rome, pulling down the greater part of the English Church also. Margaret sat by perfectly quiet; she no longer attempted excuses, even when Craven brought a charge of hypocrisy against every Romanist that had lived; protesting that the religion was a tissue of absurdities from beginning to end, and that no man in his senses ever believed it, however he might use it as a cloak for his secret purposes. With three persons like Craven, Mrs. Percival, and Miss Debrett, reasoning was hopeless; but Margaret's mind travelled swiftly to Hennings-

ley, and whilst the fierce invectives against the Church of Rome met her ear, her thoughts were dwelling upon the exquisite repose, the grace, purity, and dignity of the Countess Novera, and the chastened, thoughtful earnestness of the Romish confessor. There was a pause when the storm of abuse had a little subsided, and Miss Debrett, her nerves highly agitated, and her imagination set at work, rose to say good-by. "I shall not have the young woman, you may be quite certain, my dear Mrs. Percival," she said. "I am so glad Craven has told me all this: I knew the Catholics were very wicked, but I had no idea they were such wretches. No, I will have nothing to do with them."

"What young woman?" inquired Margaret.

Miss Debrett repeated her history, allowing that as yet the fact of her being a Roman Catholic was only Staunton gossip; that she had come highly recommended, and that her appearance was very pleasing; that, in fact, she was the only person whom she had seen likely to suit her when Jenkins was gone.

"Then, why give her up without inquiry?" said Mrs. Percival.

"I don't know, but I imagined you disapproved; that you would object to her being a Catholic."

"As to disapproving," replied Mrs. Percival, unable to refrain from a smile, "it is your business to do that. I certainly should not advise you to have her if she is one; but I would find that out first."

"Well, to be sure, it would be best. I am so glad I called: I never do manage to settle the right thing myself. But what shall I do? I shall not see her again till next week, and she may be engaged by some one else before that time, and so I shall lose her entirely. Dear me, how unfortunate!"

Miss Debrett looked really distressed, and the

merits of the rejected applicant rose distinctly to view. "She was so very tidy, so civil-spoken, and she had been used to nursing, and was fond of cats."

"But is there no way of hearing of her?" asked Margaret.

"O yes, my love, a great many, if I could manage it. But she lives out of the town, and I don't think Jenkins will go and see about her for me, and I can't trust the woman of the house; and letters, you know, may be lost."

"Will it not do for me to go?" asked Margaret. "Is it any distance within a walk?"

"It is at Henningsley; the cottage close to the lodge, my dear. But I have not walked so far for years."

"But I have, every day of my life nearly," said Margaret; "and it will be no trouble to me. Just tell me what I am to say, and the young woman shall call upon you this evening, if you like it."

"Not this evening, my love, because I shall be having my tea, and I have taken lately to going to bed early—not this evening, but to-morrow, in the morning, at twelve o'clock; then I can bring her over here for your mamma to see her. But, my dear Margaret, I don't know why I should give you so much trouble."

"It will be no trouble whatever," replied Margaret: "it is merely taking one road instead of another; and we were going out directly, were we not, Craven?"

Craven agreed, but hinted that he did not feel safe in venturing into such a dangerous neighbourhood. He always thought of gunpowder plots when he heard of Romanists; and who knew but that they might suddenly find themselves blown up into

the air, whilst they were talking to this civil-spoken damsel?"

"She was very civil-spoken, to be sure," said Miss Debrett, with an air of thought; "but that was what I liked. Are you quite certain, my dear Mrs. Percival, that you would recommend her?"

"I would recommend you to inquire about her, by all means," replied Mrs. Percival, growing impatient. "Margaret will undertake the business, and, when she has seen the young woman, we can talk it over together."

"Thank you,—so like you,—so very kind; and you promised to let me know the moment you heard of dear Agatha and the Colonel."

"Yes, Margaret shall send you a line; but very likely we shall not see them this evening. Agatha made a point of our not waiting at Ashington, because they might arrive late."

"Well, you are very patient and good, I must say; quite a pattern for all mothers. Margaret, dear, perhaps you will call on your return, and let me know what your opinion of the young woman is."

"If I do not call, I will write," said Margaret, knowing the length of time which a visit would involve.

Miss Debrett performed the usual salutations, and Craven looked on, drawing up his head, whilst a smile played round his mouth, as if he feared that the favour would be extended to him. He followed her, however, politely to the gate, congratulating her upon the happy prospect of a Romanist household; and assuring her that, whatever she might hear to the contrary, there was no doubt it was extremely dangerous to live under the same roof with any person who had ever been called a Papist.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Margaret had great difficulty in keeping her attention fixed upon any thing which her brother said during the course of their long scrambling walk. Craven talked incessantly and amusingly, but Margaret desired silence, such silence as would give her time for reflection. There was none, however, till they had made a circuit of three miles, going through narrow lanes and ploughed fields, entangling themselves in brushwood, and clambering stiles. It was precisely the walk to prevent any thing like a consecutive train of ideas, and Craven was so much the more pleased, for there was no occasion to renew, or allude to disagreeable subjects. They passed over the hill at the back of Henningsley, and Margaret, with a longing, envious eye, watched the smoke curling up from the massive chimney, and thought how happy she could be if she were sitting, as she had been at the same hour on the previous day, in the bay-windowed drawing-room, with the Countess by her side, and Father Andrea standing with the volume of Milton in his hand, delighting her with the remarks and criticisms of a man who had studied deeply not merely classical and theological literature, but the lighter subjects of poetry and art. The enjoyment had been transient, and many months might elapse before it could be experienced again. Margaret thought of this with the greater regret, from the contrast the preceding day's conversation presented to that in which she

had lately taken a part. Sincere minds instinctively turn from what appears to them exaggeration and injustice. Margaret had discovered both in what had been said, and the effect was to give her a bias precisely in the opposite direction. There were many facts of a similar nature to those repeated by her brother, which she had often heard, and they had served to prejudice her strongly against the doctrines and the practices of the Romish Church. She had felt them so repugnant to her principles of right, that when first she knew the Countess she had tried to forget her as a Romanist. The extreme doctrines seemed unsuited to her. She had pictured to herself an ideal creed in harmony with the Countess's character, and which, by degrees, had assumed the form of reality. It might include deference to the Pope as the supreme head of the Church, confession and absolution, reverence for the saints and the blessed Virgin Mary, but little besides — certainly nothing approaching to idolatry or superstition, nothing which would sanction crime; nothing cruel or worldly. The assertions made by her brother had from this cause shocked her sense of justice: they appeared libellous. Her heart turned towards the religion which she considered to be calumniated, and her belief in the extent to which it had corrupted the doctrines of the primitive Church became less firm. If there were such misrepresentations and exaggerations in one instance, it was not unnatural to suppose there might be the same in all. These ideas floated in Margaret's mind as she walked leisurely through the copse which skirted the park, following the straight path, whilst the children ran amongst the trees with Craven, making the air ring with their merry laughter. They emerged from the wood into the high road, and here they were to separate. Margaret was to cross the fields in order

to reach the cottage by the lodge, and Craven was to take the children home.

"You will be careful of them, Craven, now, won't you?" said Margaret, as Grace and Philip ran off by themselves. "Mamma will hold me responsible if they are led into any mischief."

"Take care of yourself, Margaret; you are in much greater danger than we are. Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot for ever"

He nodded a laughing farewell, and hurried Harriet away; and Margaret, opening a gate, pursued her path over the fields. The afternoon was lovely, and the bracing air seemed to refresh her mind as well as her body. She breathed freely, and looked around her cheerfully, watching the varied shapes of the white clouds sailing slowly across the sky, marking the gradations of colour, — brown, and orange, and pale yellow, — which had just begun to tinge the foliage, and which harmonized richly with the deep crimson of the hawthorn berries on the old thorns, and the sombre red of the sandy banks, or stopping to gaze upon the purple shadows blending the distant hills, or to notice the perfect grouping of the trees, and to fix upon the spots in which, when the summer returned, they might form the best subject for a sketch. Margaret had not enjoyed a solitary walk for many days; she had almost forgotten what the luxury of solitude was, her life at home was so full of occupation and care for others. But the cottage was reached, and she was obliged to seek for admittance. She paused for an instant, unwilling to go amongst strangers, — even the poor, — and upon a matter of business. The reluctance was less strong than it used to be, when Margaret would have been as shy of making a new acquaintance amongst the villagers, as amongst persons of her own rank; for she had found by ex-

perience that there are few amongst the lower orders who do not like the visits of their superiors, when they are made cordially, and with the attention, it may even be called the politeness, which is their just due. But there was a little effort required to introduce herself, and as she stood at the gate looking at the remaining autumn flowers which still appeared gay and inviting, she heard a door open on the opposite side of the cottage, and directly afterwards a man walked rather quickly towards a stile which parted the garden from a field next the park. He stopped as he came there and looked round, and Margaret perceived that it was Father Andrea. He knew her at once, and bowed, but he did not come near, and Margaret had no excuse for addressing him. His presence there she considered a confirmation of the intelligence Miss Debrett had received. Father Andrea walked away, but very slowly, and Margaret knocked at the cottage-door. A faint voice bade her come in, and gently lifting the latch, she entered. A young girl, apparently in the last stage of consumption, was sitting, propped up by pillows, in an arm-chair by the fire; some work was on the table beside her, but there were no books, and no signs that she had been reading, though on a shelf in the corner lay a large Bible, and a number of tracts, besides two or three stray volumes, which had apparently been well used. The room was scrupulously neat, the walls were papered, the pewter dishes bright, and the china cups ranged in regular order in the open closet. There were coloured prints also put up for ornament, and a couple of brass candlesticks, and a japanned snuffer-tray on the mantelpiece, besides a piece of carpet by the fire, and a footstool. But Margaret's attention was little attracted by these things: they satisfied her that there could be no actual poverty, and then

she turned with interest to the sick girl. Her countenance was of a deadly paleness, except in the one hectic spot which marked the burning fever that consumed her. Her hands seemed scarcely more than the bones of a skeleton, so thin they were, and transparent, and her glassy eye wandered restlessly about as if seeking for the rest which suffering forbade her to find. It was this expression of restlessness which struck Margaret especially. The girl started when she entered, and her voice was not merely weak but frightened. She tried several times to look round to the door through which Father Andrea must have departed; and once or twice, as Margaret stopped in order not to fatigue her by questions, she observed that she seemed to be listening for something. All that she said at broken intervals, and interrupted by a short dry cough, confirmed what Miss Debrett had heard, except the fact of her religion. When this was mentioned, the girl's manner changed; her answers were short. She said that she had been bred up to the Church of England, and Mr. Stanley knew her very well. Her sister had been at service in a Baptist family; she generally went to the Baptist chapel, but she would not mind going to church.

"But perhaps your mother would object," said Margaret.

"No; mother does not care; she likes the Wesleyans; and Tom preaches there; but it is all the same."

The girl leant back in her chair, with a look of distress. Margaret repeated to herself, "it is all the same."

The words had struck upon a painful chord.

"Then you will tell your sister to call upon Miss Debrett to-morrow, at twelve o'clock."

"Yes, ma'am, certainly;" but there was no

graciousness in the voice, and Margaret thought that perhaps she had been inconsiderate in troubling a person so ill.

"Is there any thing I can do for you?" she said with great kindness of tone and manner.

"Nothing, thank you, ma'am."

"I shall be glad to hear how you are," continued Margaret, her interest strangely excited by this unusual reserve.

"Your name is what?"

"Rhoda — Rhoda Newbolt."

"Rhoda! an uncommon name," observed Margaret.

"They like Scripture names at the chapel," said the girl, and she was silent again.

"Well, then, Rhoda, I shall come another day, if I can, and see how you are going on; and perhaps you may be able to tell me something I can do for you."

"Thank you, ma'am," and Rhoda tried to rise from her chair to show the parting civilities. Margaret, however, insisted upon her remaining still, and after re-arranging the pillows which had fallen down, once more begged that the message to the sister might not be forgotten, and went away.

There was an oppressive weight upon her heart, when she again stepped forth into the open air; she seldom visited the cottage of the poor without it; a sense of powerlessness, uselessness; a thought that she was one—weak and helpless, and that the evils against which she would fain contend were legion. And she was a woman, a young woman, scarcely more than a girl; very ignorant, very sinful, wanting in judgment, experience, knowledge of the human heart. She could not govern herself, or teach the children aright, how then could she hope to do good amongst strangers — the poor, educated

under totally different circumstances from any which had occurred to her ? And what was her authority? If she spoke to them, how could she call upon them to listen ? If she reproved them, what right had she to take upon herself the office of their judge ? And if, as she knew by experience was frequently the case, they misled her by wilful falsehoods, how could she convict them? The sound of the church clock at Deering striking the hour awoke a different train of associations ; yet not different, only directed from herself to the clergyman of her parish,—the good-natured rector, wasting his days in indolent comfort, when hundreds were perishing around him in the paths of vice, or wandering from his fold to seek instruction from self-appointed pastors. From the rector, there was but one step to the Church at whose altars he ministered. That particular case of spiritual destitution was not solitary; complaints were rising up every where. The history of the dense masses of the metropolis, and the manufacturing towns, was but a repetition of the same tale magnified a hundred fold ; and if from them thought wandered to the vast colonies, where English laws and English customs were fast extirpating all traces of the original ownership of the lands, there was a picture of infidelity and unutterable wickedness which the mind shrank from contemplating. In the midst of this accumulation of horrors where was the Church? Margaret was bewildered. She gazed in sadness upon the turrets of Henningsley, and thought that Father Andrea might be right. Where there was such fearful neglect, there could be no claim to superiority. The idea seemed as if by a sudden spell to have conjured up the person of whom she was thinking, for, as she turned to pursue her walk homewards, she saw Father Andrea coming towards her. He was looking grave and

severe as ever, but there was a gentle courteousness in his voice when he addressed her, which found an avenue at once to Margaret's heart. He apologised for having allowed her to pass before without speaking, but added, "that he was in much haste, and saw that she was upon an errand of charity."

"Business, not charity," replied Margaret. "I wished to ask a question for a friend, but I have never been in that cottage till to-day."

"Indeed! I imagined you were well acquainted with all the poor in the neighbourhood."

"That can scarcely be called a poor cottage," said Margaret: "there were many symptoms of unusual comfort."

"It may be poor in other respects," he replied; "and sickness will very frequently bring poverty in its train."

"Yes," said Margaret; "and that is an extreme case: one without hope, apparently."

"Without earthly hope," replied Father Andrea, emphatically; "but the Countess Novera has provided for all necessities to the best of her ability."

"There seemed little wanting except books," observed Margaret.

Father Andrea was silent for an instant.

"You saw none?" he enquired.

"None, except the Bible, and the tracts on the shelf. Perhaps what she requires is to be talked to and read to."

"By the clergyman of the parish," said Father Andrea.

Margaret was aware of a little confusion, but she hoped the Romish priest did not remark it.

"Mr. Stanley is a kind-hearted man," she said.

"So I have heard; he must have a large population to attend to."

"Fifteen hundred persons."

"Fifteen hundred souls," said Father Andrea, and there was silence again.

"But that one family can scarcely be considered to be under his care," continued Margaret; "they are Dissenters."

"And he has given them up, then?"

"No, I don't suppose that exactly; but they have left the Church."

"Or have been left by it?"

It was the first severe word the confessor had said, and Margaret could not be angry, for it was just.

"It is useless to attempt concealing the fact," she said, in a tone of candour for which Father Andrea was not prepared: "the parish is miserably neglected."

"You exaggerate," he replied mildly. "Those whom Mr. Stanley cannot attend to, other persons can. You yourself, I have heard, are constant in your exertions."

"Me!" exclaimed Margaret, extremely pained; "Oh, no: who could say that? But if I did my utmost, who and what am I? Individuals have no power."

"Are you serious in saying so, Miss Percival?"

"I am serious in saying, and in feeling it," replied Margaret; "and I am a woman: teaching and guiding cannot be my province."

"Yet I have seen women working zealously, humbly, with the greatest success," observed the confessor; "not, indeed, undertaking the duties of men, but watching over the sick and the destitute; standing like ministering angels by the bedside of the dying; and winning souls to Christ by the saint-like purity of their lives. They were members

of another communion: you would call them Romanists."

"The sisters of charity," replied Margaret. "Yes, I have read of them, and fancied that if one might dare to choose one's lot in life, theirs would be the safest and the holiest; but they do not act individually."

"No; they are members of a body, bound together by laws, kept under discipline. They act as parts of the Church, and the authority of the Church goes with their efforts."

"And they are guided and directed continually," said Margaret, remembering her own weak endeavours.

"Yes, they have persons to whom they can apply in all cases of difficulty, and they are trained for the work by the system under which they live. But the Catholic Church has peculiar ideas on this subject, she does not contemplate doing good by individuals."

Margaret felt uncomfortable, almost unhappy; yet the very uneasiness she experienced seemed to urge her to continue the conversation.

"We have no institutions of the kind in the English Church," she said, "except what are called district visitors."

"And are they a body living together?"

"Oh, no, all separate; taken from different families, or rather offering themselves. But they have meetings at stated intervals."

"And a strict surveillance is kept over them, no doubt?" said Father Andrea.

Margaret could not help smiling, for she had lately received an account of the proceedings of a society in Staunton, and had been surprised at the freedom upon all points allowed to its different members.

"I believe," she said, "that in a large parish, a clergyman has so much to attend to that the surveillance of which you speak is next to impossible. The visitors do what they can, and state any cases of particular distress, but they must be left very much to their own responsibility."

"They are persons of mature age, then, are they not?"

"Some may be, others are quite young girls; but it is impossible to be particular, because where there is very much to be done, and where few are willing to devote themselves, there can be no choice."

"The numbers of the sisters of charity are always full," said Father Andrea; "but they are not the only persons who are associated in bodies. The Catholic Church has also her houses of refuge for women who are left unprotected, or for any persons, male or female, who may wish to dedicate themselves to a stricter life of devotion, than is possible when mixing in the world."

"Monasteries and convents?" said Margaret. "We had such once in England, but they were greatly abused."

"So men say," replied Father Andrea; and, avoiding the question involved in Margaret's observation, he added, "you have missionary schemes, I think?"

Margaret said, "Yes;" but, conscious of her own ignorance, she shrank from the subject.

"Yet it is strange," continued the Confessor, "how seldom we hear much of the working of the English establishment in the colonies."

"There are bishops in India, New Zealand, Australia, the Canadas," said Margaret.

"But comparatively lately established, I believe. I suppose the reason I know so little of what they

have done, is because my attention has been principally turned to the operations of the Catholic Church, which has long provided for the necessities of the native and Christian population of these countries. Yet, perhaps, I am in error in attributing so little to Protestants, if I may include the sects who have worked with you."

Margaret was about to disclaim any such support, but she did not know upon what grounds she could base her objection. Father Andrea allowed a pause to follow; and then he said, rather suddenly, whilst a smile played upon his lips, —

"You have never, perhaps, read the account of the Jesuit missions in Paraguay."

"No, never," replied Margaret; and her suspicion was instantly aroused.

"I am not a member of the order," said the Confessor, carelessly; "but I thought the subject might interest you."

"I am afraid I am rather prejudiced against the Jesuits," answered Margaret. "You know the name in England has passed into a proverb for double meaning."

"Yes, I know it well; but I should like you to judge for yourself. Will you let me give you a few facts?"

Margaret assented, and willingly; the mystery connected with the name of a Jesuit excited her utmost interest. Father Andrea noticed the sparkling of her eye, and the eagerness with which she listened, and he thought he might venture farther than he had at first intended. He began with the founder of the order himself, described his zeal, spirituality, devotedness to the cause he had espoused; from him he proceeded to Xavier, Lainez, Peter Faber, and their followers: he sketched the progress of their establishments in Europe, their

rapid advancement, their marvellous power, their deep insight into the human heart, — ending by almost startling her with the details of their conversions in heathen countries, not by tens, nor hundreds, but by thousands. Margaret's brain grew confused. Father Andrea had lost his sobered, stern demeanour, and, animated by his subject, his words flowed eloquently. He made no pause, gave no time for questions and examinations, such as those with which Margaret had convinced her brother of exaggeration; his assertions were dogmatic, and Margaret could not dispute them; and when he had ended, she could say nothing in reply, for there was no room left for doubt.

Father Andrea saw his success, but there was no trace of the consciousness in his manner. He only apologized for having, as he feared, fatigued her with his subject, by saying that he hoped that its importance would plead his excuse. "A priest of the Catholic Church," he added, "cannot but feel an overwhelming interest in all which throws light upon his great duty of winning and training for heaven the souls of his fellow sinners."

As he spoke they stood before the front of Deering parsonage. A man servant was at the gate, ordering angrily away a woman with two ragged children, who were begging for charity.

"My master gives nothing to trampers," said the man, in a surly voice. The woman looked ill, and mentioned that hers was a case of distress in the parish. The man again repeated his orders; and whilst she still lingered, Mr. Stanley rode up with two ladies; they were laughing heartily, and Mr. Stanley, taking out his watch, declared that they were very late. Margaret could not stop to know all that passed, but she heard the Rector tell his servant to give the woman a shilling, and bid her call to-

morrow. This might be right, or it might not; she was not the person to judge ; but a look, it almost amounted to a contemptuous expression, was visible on Father Andrea's face.

" I must leave you here," he said, " but I had nearly forgotten the subject which I most wished to name. You will, I think, pardon me for troubling you with a secret, in which the comfort of another person is concerned."

Margaret looked at him in wonder.

" It may not seem to you a very important one," he continued, " but that poor girl — had you heard any report about her before you saw her ?"

" I was told that she was a Romanist," replied Margaret.

" A Catholic; yes, you are right; she is one, so are many of the people on the Henningsley estate. But she belongs to a family where her religion is not merely disliked, but hated. My visits are necessarily rare ; to-day I knew that she was alone, and I had the opportunity of a short conversation with her. You will do me the favour not to mention that you met me."

Margaret promised readily, and Father Andrea thanked her with much warmth of manner. As they parted he said, —

" The Countess will see you again before she goes of course, and we may look forward, I hope, to renewing our acquaintance after the winter."

Margaret agreed to visit Henningsley if possible in a few days, and then retraced her steps home, with a mixture of irritation at the style of the conversation, sorrow at the projected separation, and secret regret that she should probably have so few opportunities of increasing her uneasiness, by another walk with the Romish priest.

When Margaret reached home, she found her

mother in a state of great excitement, having just received a note from Agatha, written from Ashington. Mrs. Percival was eager to go there at once, but it was late. Dr. Percival was impatient for his dinner, and reminded her that Agatha particularly said that she should not expect to see any of them.

"Let them have a quiet evening to themselves, Julia," he said, "they must be tired; besides, I don't see why my house is to be put into confusion to-night."

"There will be no confusion, my dear; Margaret will be at home, and you don't consider how anxious I must be."

"But I suppose Margaret will be wanting to go too: women are so restless. No, no, leave it to-night."

Mrs. Percival looked at Margaret, expecting to hear her entreaties seconded; but Margaret, standing by the fire, listened with an air of indifference, which was scarcely disturbed by her mother's exclamation of —

"My love, what is the matter? you seem not to care about Agatha!"

"Me! oh yes, mamma; we can go the first thing to-morrow. It must be time to dress for dinner now;" and Margaret hastened away.

Not care for Agatha! yes, Margaret did care more truly and more kindly than her mother; but the affection was not elicited at that instant, even by the prospect of their meeting. Father Andrea's words were rankling in her breast, and Father Andrea's voice and manner were haunting her memory. So zealous, so reverent, so confident of his own faith, and the truth of his Church. Could he be in error? Falsehood can tempt us in any shape, even by appealing to our virtues; and

charity and humility whispered to Margaret, that where so much was saintly in feeling, there could be little wrong in doctrine or practice. She did not think now, that she would take her prayer-book to Henningsley and teach the Countess to admire it; rather she said within herself, that she would enquire more into the rites and services of the Romish Church; she would see what there was in it which could so powerfully influence the mind; she would endeavour to discover whether the Countess really did believe all the points which she had been accustomed to condemn; that is, she would inquire when the Countess returned in the spring or summer. For the present, she would cherish her remembrance as the most beautiful vision of outward grace and inward purity which had ever yet been presented to her view, and think of Father Andrea as the representative of all that a holy, devoted servant of God, might and ought to be. And Mr. Sutherland — how was he to be considered in comparison? Was he to be Father Andrea's equal? Self-denying, humble-minded, sincere, zealous — Margaret had hitherto believed that no one could be like him; but there was one thing wanting: no mystery surrounded Mr. Sutherland. All that he did, and said, appeared open as the day. His dress, and manner, and actions were perfectly simple; so much so, that it was only after long acquaintance that any accurate idea could be formed of the depth of his mind. But Father Andrea, at first sight, bore the stamp of a man distinguished from the ordinary world. Something there might be in his dress, but there was much more in his deep sonorous voice, his stern cast of countenance, his words, now uttered hastily, as if the outpouring of a spirit eager to give vent to its fulness of thought; and then

checked, and mastered by a powerful will. And Father Andrea wrought upon Margaret's imagination, as belonging to a different communion, and being governed by laws, which for ages had ruled with despotic sway over nations and characters of every different class.

Mr. Sutherland was one of a body of whom Margaret believed she knew all that could be told. They were excluded from ordinary vocations, but there was no secrecy in their internal government; no peculiarity in their mode of living. Of their spiritual authority she had thought but little; and since her conversations with Father Andrea it had sunk in her estimation. Few minds, certainly few young minds, can resist the influence of a doubt implied without hesitation; and it required more faith than Margaret then possessed, to believe that the rector of Deering could lay claim to any particular respect, by virtue of an office which he neglected to fulfil. Mr. Sutherland was indeed very different; but even he did not possess the distinctive marks which rendered Father Andrea an object of so much reverence. Margaret could not but respect and love him; but she had no hesitation in arguing with and differing from him. Before the mysterious character of the Romish priest, she felt that her whole soul would bow in acknowledgment of inferiority, and in the act of humiliation her spirit would find repose. The right of private judgment is much spoken of, and supposed to be a great privilege; but there are not many, especially amongst women, who find it so. Their very physical weakness makes them willing to be governed, especially in questions of religion; and it is in this way that a power which comes before them, speaking authoritatively and requiring unreserved submission, seizes upon their imagination, and easily triumphs

over their reason. Superiority of intellect is no safeguard; for the minds which think the most, have the greatest perception of the awfulness and mysteriousness of life, and the greatest longing for rest.

A visible, infallible guide, is to some the only refuge from the changes, the unceasing fluctuations of opinion, which agitate them when they venture forth into the unfathomable ocean of perplexity lying beyond the actual region of sight. So men can live engrossed in earthly cares, and die without more than a passing wish to know that which shall follow after; but let the eye be opened to the vanity of the things of time, and the intense longing to realize the hereafter of eternity will be quieted only by the humble spirit of faith, which, trusting in the mercy of God, is satisfied with that which he has plainly revealed; or by speculations which enter into the secrets of the Almighty, and seek to determine the condition of the soul in the intermediate state. Either a childlike faith, or a supposed certainty they must have, who hope to cultivate their reason, and purify their hearts, and yet know peace. But it is mercifully ordered, that the needs of our animal nature, and the common requirements of society, step in to prevent too great an exercise of thought. If Margaret had been left to herself, she would have spent the remainder of the evening in solitude, trying to recall all that Father Andrea had said, and perhaps considering how Mr. Sutherland would have answered; or raising questions which by her own knowledge she would not have been able to answer. Instead of this, she was obliged to go down stairs and endeavour to enter into conversation. She was called upon afterwards by Harriet to look over some exercises, and obliged to prepare some questions in

history for Grace to answer the next day; and after tea Craven insisted upon having a musical evening, and beginning early; and when the clock struck ten, Margaret had not been at liberty to follow her own inclinations for one quarter of an hour. There was a little fretfulness in her mind when she went to bed; a thought that every one else had been amused or instructed at her expense. But she little knew how great a blessing this constant occupation, this unceasing demand upon her self-denial really was. Left to herself, and to her own pursuits, Margaret would have become visionary, and indolent, and indulged in doubts which could only end in fatal error. The practical duties, even the common necessities, the eating, drinking, and sleeping, which could not be omitted, were of incalculable use to her. They served as checks and balances to a vivid, but as yet an ill-regulated imagination.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The grounds of Ashington were looking lovely when Agatha descended to the breakfast-room, the first morning after taking possession of her new home. One less easily captivated by outward beauty, might well have felt a glow of exultation at the thought of being the mistress of such a place, and Agatha's face fully expressed her satisfaction. She was alone, and there was nothing at the instant to remind her of the price at which she had purchased her worldly elevation. The future spread before her glittering and unchangeable; her lot in life was fixed, and fixed for the enjoyment of all the luxury which wealth could obtain. But a voice was heard in the hall, and Agatha started from a brilliant reverie. The countenance of her husband was not cloudless like her own. He had missed some articles of his dressing apparatus, and had been abusing his valet for carelessness.

"I shall turn him off, Agatha," he said rather moodily, drawing his chair to the table.

"I doubt if you will find any one to suit you better," she replied. "He was very attentive when we were travelling."

"He might have been attentive to you, my dear, but he was not to me. I had to complain of him every day."

Agatha had already learnt that there was no surer way of increasing Colonel Clive's annoyance, than by taking the part of any one with whom he found fault.

She made no reply, and the breakfast proceeded without much attempt at conversation; Agatha thought a little of the description which she had read in novels, of the conduct of husbands and wives under similar circumstances; but the comparison which followed was not satisfactory, and she proceeded to other contemplations. Colonel Clive, however, never was possessed by any notion without wearing it threadbare; and after a long pause he again exclaimed,—

"I shall turn him off, Agatha."

"If you do," answered Agatha, "you had better let me ask mamma to recommend you another man."

"No, I think my sister is the best person to consult."

"I don't see why that should be," observed Agatha, with a slight tone of pique.

Colonel Clive relapsed into abstraction, though not sufficiently so to prevent his making a hearty breakfast.

"My sister will be here this morning, and I shall talk to her," he observed, bursting forth suddenly again.

Agatha could be indifferent to much which might have disturbed other tempers, but interference was unendurable. "I really wish," she said, "that I might be allowed to have a voice in the management of the household."

"He is the most lazy, sulky fellow in existence," continued the colonel, regardless of the remark. "I shall turn him off; yes, I shall certainly turn him off."

"Mamma will be sure to know some one to take his place," replied Agatha; "I can ask her when I see her."

"I don't wish you to ask any one, my dear. Leave me, if you please, to manage my own affairs."

"That butler of your sister's is detestable," pursued Agatha; "all but an idiot."

"My sister will be here in the course of the day," said the colonel; "she will dine here, and then I shall describe the sort of person I want."

"Mamma, and papa, and Craven, and Margaret, will be here, too," observed Agatha. "I don't think your sister will care to meet a family-party."

"I shall beg her to come, at all events. I can't be bored with this man any longer."

Agatha took refuge in silence and hot rolls; and the servant entering with letters and a newspaper, the subject was dropped. But it was not forgotten by one at least. Agatha's jealousy of Mrs. St. Aubyn's influence had been aroused before her marriage, and had caused a decided coolness, veiled under a mask of politeness. The question of the man-servant was really not of much consequence to her, for Mrs. St. Aubyn might be just as able to recommend a good one as Mrs. Percival; but Agatha could not, and would not brook, what seemed an invasion of her rights. There was a quiet perverseness in her manner the whole of the morning, remarkably irritating to a fretful, impatient man; and before the arrival of the party from the Grove, the incipient feud had twice broken out into open violence of temper on Colonel Clive's part. The hall bell rang in the midst of the last altercation. The colonel left the room, uttering an exclamation very far from gentle; and Agatha smoothed her brow, and forced her mouth into a smile, and went to greet her mother and Margaret. It was a proud moment for Mrs. Percival. She saw her daughter the wife of a man of fortune and family, lovely in feature, elegant in dress, soft and affectionate in

manner to herself, and apparently full of cheerfulness and contentment. No fondness could have desired any thing beyond; at least, no such fondness as Mrs. Percival's. Margaret looked at her sister with surprise. She had fancied that Agatha must appear in some way different; that she would look or speak so as to betray something either of deeper happiness or sorrow. But Agatha was scarcely in any way altered. She smiled brightly, spoke cheerfully, enquired with particular interest about the Grove, and the children, and her friends; — one circumstance only was remarkable; she did not mention her husband. They walked into the garden: Margaret thought she saw Colonel Clive at a distance; but if he were there, Agatha avoided him. Margaret grew annoyed and suspicious; this company manner was not what she had anticipated. Mrs. Percival asked several times for "the dear Colonel," but Agatha professed ignorance of his movements.

"He had his own peculiar ways of occupying himself," she said, with a shade of sarcasm in the tone, which did not escape Margaret's watchfulness.

"Well! we shall see him at dinner," observed Mrs. Percival. "We shall all come, my love, since you wish it so much; and I thought of bringing Harriet too, because then I can better leave the little ones with Baker."

At that instant, they turned the corner of a walk, and came suddenly upon Colonel Clive. There was no retreat — Agatha glanced at her husband, then at Margaret, to discover how much of the morning's dispute was likely to be visible and was satisfied that Mrs. Percival's eagerness and cordiality would compel the colonel to relax. A feeling of greater ease was stealing over the party. Agatha thought she might venture a step towards

the attainment of her desired object, her own way. She kept her mother back and mentioned their wish, theirs she called it, not the colonel's, of having another man-servant; but Colonel Clive heard the words, and his displeasure burst forth — to Mrs. Percival's dismay, and Margaret's shame and sorrow. Agatha stood unmoved, a scornful smile curling her lip; and when the torrent of words was ended, she begged that she might be allowed to pass, and entered the house. After the lapse of a few minutes, she returned to the drawing-room; Colonel Clive was still there, fretting and fuming. Agatha took up her work, and addressed her mother, and Margaret almost believed she must be in good humour; but the storm which for a moment gathered on her brow, when, unannounced and apparently unexpected, Mrs. St. Aubyn entered, was no sign of amiability. Yet even then she was polite, perfectly so; the only fault that could be found with her was, that the politeness was uncalled for. Mrs. St. Aubyn's manner was that of a person at home. In her brother's house it was natural that it should be. Agatha's was carefully ceremonious. Colonel Clive was a little soothed by his sister's presence, and Margaret trusted that he would not again allude to the unpleasant subject. The question, however, came at last.—"Do you know of a good man-servant?" Agatha did not appear to listen whilst Mrs. St. Aubyn told of the two or three who, as is always the case with good servants, might have been had some weeks before; but when, as she continued, Colonel Clive vacantly turned over the pages of a handsome book of prints, in the awkward way which marks a person who does not care for such things, Agatha threw down her work, broke off a conversation with her mother, and silently taking the book from her hus-

band's hand, pointed to the thumb-marks. Margaret, in consternation, started up, saying that she must go, if her mother did not care. At the instant she did not know what reason to give for her sudden haste; but any excuse seemed desirable to avert the wrath of the colonel's fiery eyes; and she ran through the list of her day's occupations, not allowing a pause for any one to interrupt her. Mrs. Percival looked astonished, but she was not inclined to object, though, for herself, she said, she should stay there, as she had many things to say to dear Agatha. Margaret hoped that she might be allowed to walk home alone; but Mrs. St. Aubyn having declined the invitation to dinner, on the plea that she had already engaged the Countess Novera's young Italian friend to spend the day with her, proposed that Margaret should accompany her in the carriage. Margaret's heart was too heavy to desire any such society, but she was obliged to agree; and after a cold unsatisfactory parting from Agatha, and a promise to return with her father, Craven, and Harriet, by dinner time, she departed.

"And this is Agatha's happiness!" she said to herself, as the carriage drove off. How the aspect of all external was changed, even in that short interview. Margaret could have understood her sister's hopes of enjoyment in the morning, when she looked upon the beautiful place of which she was the mistress; but now she only sorrowed over her delusion. Well might Mr. Sutherland have prophesied of the suffering which is necessary to root out of the heart a worldly selfishness. But Margaret could not then give way to painful anticipations, for Mrs. St. Aubyn demanded her attention. The conversation began; and almost the first obser-

vation which was made completed Margaret's depression.

"So we shall lose our friends at Henningsley, Margaret, almost immediately. Lucia tells me they go at the end of the week."

The words were rather a shock, for Margaret had in her own mind made the fortnight at least a month.

"I dare say you will not care as much as I do," continued Mrs. St. Aubyn, observing her silence; "but I shall miss that pretty little Italian girl extremely, and she is becoming quite fond of me."

Margaret remarked that she looked quick, and Mrs. St. Aubyn immediately launched out more warmly into her praise, adding, "my regard for the Countess has been increased by her. The friendship between the two is really quite romantic."

Again Margaret felt as if something had struck her; the sensation was such as she imagined jealousy to produce, but she was not aware that jealousy was in her disposition. She wished to hear more, and yet disliked the sound of the Countess's name from Mrs. St. Aubyn's lips. She was spared many more communications, however, for Mrs. St. Aubyn desired to alight at the entrance of the town, and Margaret was sent home alone. The house looked dreary when she entered it; without life or interest; full of duties and no pleasures. And the duties so trifling! so widely different from the animating employments which Father Andrea had pourtrayed when describing the life of a missionary of the Romish church, labouring in a foreign land, devoting himself to his grand work, and finding in it sufficient to satisfy all his desires. Margaret was sure that, in such a cause, she could labour likewise. Privation would be no hardship, loneliness would

scarcely be suffering. For a great trial, a great spirit would of necessity be aroused; but for a trifling one of no consequence—under the influence of a passing discontent, Margaret made a grievous error. How can any trials be trifling? For beings born for eternity, how can any event which brings them nearer, even in the most remote degree, to endless happiness or misery, be thought to be of no consequence?

CHAPTER XXX.

Mrs. St. Aubyn was correct in her report, that the Countess would leave Henningsley in a few days. Lady Anstruther had written to request that she would without fail join her in London, and travel with her into Devonshire. There was not one of the little party who had not some cause to regret the arrangement. Lucia lamented openly that she should be separated from her kind friend Mrs. St. Aubyn; the Countess thought in private of Margaret; and Father Andrea tried to persuade himself that it would be better to allow his words to take root, and work out their natural effect, than to be actually on the spot, under the temptation to speak unguardedly, and perhaps defeat his own object. Yet he could not entirely banish regret — the case seemed so hopeful. Margaret was humble-minded, and candid; there seemed no prejudices standing in his way; and perhaps, during his absence, other subjects might arise to occupy her mind, or other friends might be found to supplant the Countess in her affections. Father Andrea feared that Margaret might be versatile, for it was rather a characteristic of her sex. Even the Countess, he thought, might have been so under different circumstances; and Lucia he saw, was already losing something of the stability which had formerly marked her character. For her sake, he was not sorry that they were to remove from Henningsley. Beatrice was now made a sharer in all the Confessor's thoughts regarding Margaret. He

repeated to her the conversation which he had held when they last met, and expressed his wonder that any one aware as she seemed to be, of the deficiencies of her own Church, should yet retain an attachment for it.

"Yet it is but early prejudice," he said; "and I think her sympathies would soon be enlisted on our side. Have you yet lent her any books?"

"No, Father," replied the Countess. "I would take no such step without your sanction; and you have warned me repeatedly to be cautious."

"It is well, my daughter: yet I should have been glad to know how far she is acquainted with the writings of our divines. Those of them, I mean, in whom she would find the least to startle her present belief. Massillon, Bourdaloue, Fénélon, Pascal, Thomas à Kempis, might all be read without what she would consider danger. You may try her. Mark your favourite passages, and leave the volumes with her. Now that you have resolved to propose a correspondence, you will be able to gain her opinions without difficulty."

"You have not seen the poor girl at the Lodge to-day, Father, I suppose," said the Countess.

"No; she is carefully watched. I imagine my visit must have been perceived the other day; but it was a very satisfactory one. Her belief is settled; and whether she live or die, I have no doubt that she will continue faithful to the true Church."

"Poor young creature!" exclaimed the Countess; "and to be obliged to conceal so much, and listen to the errors of those deluded people! Yes, it will indeed be a comfort to know that Miss Percival is acquainted with her state, and is watching over her."

"It will be for the good of both," replied Father

Andrea. "When the soul is hanging on the brink of another world, its thoughts become awful prophecies."

"And she will hearken to them!" exclaimed the Countess, a smile of hope breaking over her face. "Father, I see now how deep your meaning is."

"Rhoda will unconsciously work for us whilst we are away," said the Father. "I shall make her aware that Miss Percival has heard her history, and that she may confide in her; and she will pour forth to her the feelings which are now pent up in her own breast."

"And Miss Percival will not resist," replied the Countess. "When she sees the peace which is bestowed upon those who die in the communion of the true Church, she will long for it likewise. I have heard that at such seasons Protestants are harrassed by fearful doubts."

Father Andrea for a moment covered his face with his hand. Perhaps a thought of the unknown sufferings of Purgatory might have induced him to doubt of the fulness of that repose which the Countess had supposed would be granted to the last hours of a Romanist. "At any rate," he said, looking up again, "it is clearly our duty to provide for the comfort of the sick girl; and not to neglect the opportunity of leading Miss Percival to the truth. Shall you see her again before you go?"

"I had thought of doing so, Father, though the time is short: but I fear our interview is not likely to be private."

"Then do not offer her the books, or mention Rhoda's name," said Father Andrea. "It is above all things necessary that her family should not take alarm. You may write from London, which will answer every purpose."

The Countess looked grave at the mention of London.

"I shall leave all my interest behind me," she said. "Whether I am in London, or Devonshire, or elsewhere, I shall find nothing to atone for the absence of Margaret Percival; and I think, Father, that she has something of the same feeling for me."

"It could not be otherwise, my daughter," replied the priest, and he looked at her affectionately. But a change came over his countenance. It was a lovely face upon which he gazed; and the traces of a lofty, unworldly spirit were to be read in its pure and dignified expression. Yet there were lines and hues, soft and beautiful in themselves, and throwing an air of ethereal grace over the features of the Countess, which Father Andrea could never dwell upon and smile.

"There is a chilling wind to-day," he said: "you will remember, my daughter, that we are not in Italy."

The Countess saw his fears, but she had no thought for herself, and playfully insisted that she must go the round of her tenants, to bid them good bye.

"You know, Father, they are not all to be placed like Rhoda under Miss Percival's care."

"No, and therefore I would fain preserve the health of her who is their natural guardian, that when the summer returns, she may return also to watch over them." Beatrice, however, objected to this apparent unkindness, and Father Andrea's will was overruled.

Margaret and the Countess did not meet again before Henningsley was left. On returning the following day from paying a visit, Margaret was told that the Countess Novera had called during her absence and left a note and a parcel. She took the note

with a foreboding of what it would contain. It was, indeed, a farewell, hurried but affectionate. Lady Anstruther's plans, the Countess said, were so settled that she was compelled to join her immediately; and she could only look forward to the hope that when the winter months were over, she might again have an opportunity of renewing an acquaintance which had given her the greatest pleasure that she had yet enjoyed in England. In the mean time she entreated Margaret not to forget that they had known each other; to think of her in her walks, and conversations, and studies, as Beatrice herself must ever remember her; and, if possible, to prove that the regard which had sprung up in her own breast was reciprocated, by perusing the volumes which were enclosed. "They have been to me," she added, "comfort in sorrow, and support in weakness; and they will tell you more of the foundation of the hopes upon which I have long built my happiness, than I could ever explain in my own words." Sadness filled Margaret's heart when she read the concluding sentence in which the Countess prayed that God would bless her and make known to her His truth. The expression was too solemn for any ordinary parting. A light dawned upon her mind, and showed her that Beatrice grieved over what she believed to be her errors. Some months before Margaret might have smiled at such an anxiety, but now she could not. It was entertained by a person so superior to herself in devotedness to religion, that it assumed the form of an accusation. Margaret's virtues again became her temptation, and her candid confession that she was not holy like the Countess Novera, cast a slur over the Church in which she had been educated. So difficult is it to separate ourselves from the principles by which we profess to act; to condemn our own deficiencies without throwing a stigma upon

the faith which is, in itself, sufficient to make us saints. Margaret opened the parcel accompanying the note, and saw that it contained a few volumes of Massillon, and Bourdaloue's sermons, extracts from the writings of Fénélon, made in the Countess's handwriting, and the "Pensees de Pascal." Even Mr. Sutherland could not object to these books, they were in common use amongst members of the English Church. And yet she did not wish to mention that she had received them, though an unfinished letter to her uncle lay on the desk before her. He might allow that there was no harm in the books themselves, but he might fancy that if the Countess once began to lend books, she would not stop at those which were unexceptionable. He was likely to be distrustful also of her strength, though no idea could be more absurd. In fact there could be no danger. The Countess might wish that they agreed, and very naturally; Margaret wished the same; but there were no attempts at conversion, for it was well known that the orthodoxy of Pascal and Fénélon was considered doubtful by very strict Romanists.

As Mr. Sutherland would be likely to misinterpret, Margaret persuaded herself that he ought not to be put to the trial. If he objected, she would have a difficulty in going against him, and it would involve the necessity of drawing back and appearing unkind to the Countess. This was at the root of Margaret's determination; her affections were touched, and she suffered them to mislead her, still without a thought of harm. Her mother, she knew, would in no wise share Mr. Sutherland's scruples. To her it would be sufficient to say, that the Countess had lent her some French sermons. Mrs. Percival was too well pleased at the acquaintance to be likely to object to any thing which promised its continuance. The books were put away

to be studied at leisure; the note was re-read, not once, nor twice, but many times; and then Margaret sat down to finish her letter. She had been describing her meeting with Agatha, and had written freely whatever came uppermost in her thoughts. But something now had chilled the freedom — the inclination to write was over; and as the letter was not intended to be sent on that day, Margaret shut her desk, and took a volume of Massillon instead. The style of writing was extremely attractive, and the most beautiful passages were marked by pencil lines. They were mostly those which spoke of the burden of sin, the oppression of sorrow, and deadness to the world. In one or two places Beatrice had written an observation, applying what was said to herself, and Margaret felt that she was reading the revelation of her mind. Through the medium of another's words, and by the power of the most eloquent language, she was learning to penetrate the depths of the Countess's heart. Margaret read till the dinner-bell rang, and when dinner was over seized with avidity upon a few leisure moments, to return again to the study, not of Massillon's exhortations, but of the Countess Novera's character. Beatrice would have been shocked, if she had known the reverence to which her simple obedience to Father Andrea's wishes had given rise. Some parts she had marked because they explained what she wished to be; others because they suited some favourite train of ideas; others because they were in themselves beautiful. But Margaret read them all as the actual portrait of a human being — of a Romanist. She had never seemed to know so much of any one, not even of her uncle; and when forced at length to return to the drawing-room, no one in the circle of her friends appeared worthy of ad-

miration, when compared with the ideal which she had formed of the Countess Novera.

The succeeding day Margaret sat in the dull school-room, looking out upon the garden, and pursued her course of occupation with a wandering eye, and a vacant ear. Carts, and waggons, and the rumbling of a stage-coach were heard at a distance; and, now and then, the quick rattle of a lighter vehicle. Margaret sent Harriet to the drawing-room to practise, and made the little ones repeat their lessons in a low tone. With all her watchfulness, she knew that she was likely to miss the moment of the Countess's passing. To be certain that she was gone, could only give her pain; yet, with an ingenious self-torture, she allowed her mind to be distracted, and scarcely struggled against her inattention. A deeper roll, as of a heavy carriage, at last caught her notice; she threw down the children's books, and ran into the dining-room. It opened upon the front of the house, but shrubs and palings screened it from the road. Margaret had a glimpse of the postillions — the footman — the Countess's maid. The carriage was moving quickly — in a moment it had reached the gate—its cumbrous un-English form was just visible — and then it was gone; leaving on Margaret's mind nothing but a heavy sense of disappointment and loneliness, and a fancy that she had indistinctly seen a face of exquisite sweetness gazing earnestly from the window.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The romance of Margaret's daily life was now over. It was in vain to look at the turrets of Henningsley and picture the Countess's occupations; it was useless to turn from the insipidity of her home duties to the hour of relief which awaited her in her next visit: employment, unexciting and often distasteful, was before her, and it was to be carried through as best it might, with little external to animate or refresh her. It seemed hard that it should be so; that she should be thus left to herself, when domestic cares were evidently drawing nearer, and she had just begun to taste the enjoyment of affection and congeniality in a person of her own sex, living in her own neighbourhood. Margaret was inclined at first to murmur, but her practical habits saved her as they had often done before. On the very afternoon of the Countess's departure, Mrs. Percival having taken the children out, she was at liberty to make a few parish visits, and the real grievances of the poor were a striking sermon against discontent. Her trials scarcely deserved the name in comparison of theirs. All that was needed to make them light was that they should be borne in a right spirit, and if besides endeavouring to tone her mind by prayer and meditation, she could look at some of her anxieties and grapple with them, she knew that her failing energy would be strengthened. Craven's secret was that which most oppressed her. He had professed his determination of leaving them directly,

notwithstanding that his leave of absence was not expired. This was in accordance with his selfishness, though he gave very plausible reasons for it, and said that he wished to visit a friend in town. Margaret saw that the excuse was a mere pretence; his home fretted him. He had amused himself sufficiently with laughing at Colonel Clive, and had jested with Agatha until she grew angry; and now he had nothing left to assist in keeping up his spirits, for he could not bear to be alone with Margaret; she never gave him reason to suppose that she intended to refer to the subject of his debts, still less that she thought of retracting her promise; but he lived in constant fear of it, and he would give Margaret no opportunity of inducing him to be serious. This was a most uncomfortable position for her, when it seemed as if she ought to have some influence over him. His candour, and his professed affection, indicated that he had more regard for her than for any one else, and a responsibility seemed attached to her in consequence. But talking was out of the question. When he had left them she thought that she would write. Yet how could writing be of use? his answers must be public. If Mrs. Percival once found that a correspondence was kept up from which she was excluded, she would either complain, and distress herself, and suspect, till the happiness of the whole family was destroyed, or else forbid it entirely. She placed no confidence in her children, and yet her favourite theory — a very high sounding one — was, that their confidence ought to be given in an unlimited degree to her. As a mother, she believed that she had a right to exact it; and from their infancy she had done so, by forcing them to tell her whatever was passing, by never allowing them to write or receive letters which were not subjected to her inspection, by

checking every thing like unrestrained intercourse with their companions, in the vain hope that by thus closing the outlets to their feelings they would return back to her. Return indeed they did, but it was to her children's own breasts, there to be fostered without restraint, whilst hidden by a cold propriety, which without any intentional deception entirely concealed their real dispositions. No mother could be more ignorant of what her children really were than Mrs. Percival, whilst at the same time no mother could have had a more accurate knowledge of all that apparently went on amongst them. When they grew up this species of supervision was of necessity checked in its outward form, but the spirit still remained. Margaret was not commanded to show her letters, but it was expected that she should do so; and this not from curiosity, for common notes were allowed to pass without much inquiry, but from a wish on Mrs. Percival's part to enter into her children's minds. She was even more particular in their correspondence with each other than with indifferent persons, and from this cause it would be next to impossible for Margaret to be of use to Craven. She considered whether it would be well to ask as a favour that she might keep his letters private; but against this there was the fact that, in a few days, the state of his affairs must be made known, and if she then proposed this for the first time it would very naturally make her mother anxious. There might be other ways — deceitful ones; but Margaret could not do evil that good might come. She tried rather to have faith that God would guard him from evil. It was a more safe rock to build upon than her own efforts. And so Craven departed, and Margaret said "Good-bye" to him with a cheerful smile, and a whispered but most earnest request that he would remember

his promise, which was answered in a similar tone, by an injunction to manage matters carefully, and get as much out of his 'excellency' as she could. Margaret was weary of his indifference and folly. She was thankful that he was gone, though it brought the dreaded moment near when she must explain every thing to her father. Colonel Clive and Agatha were to dine with them, and it seemed a reason for delay. But when Margaret began to examine she found that it was no reason at all. She could not on any other day talk to her father at dinner, or in the evening when her mother was present; the only time was quite late; and the visitors would not interfere with this, because Colonel Clive always went away at ten o'clock, unless he was at a regular party. This was not a pleasant discovery to Margaret. She was as great a coward as the rest of the world with regard to family explosions, and had just the same inclination to procrastinate, and make false excuses to avoid doing what was disagreeable; but she was accustomed to tutor herself in little every day incidents; fetching her work directly she knew that it ought to be had; preparing for a walk as soon as the proper time arrived; giving up an interesting book whenever a superior duty claimed her attention; and now this same habit prevented her from postponing the declaration of Craven's extravagance for a single day. It was strange how greatly the difficulty seemed lessened even by the very resolution to face it. The moment Margaret had made up her mind that on that evening, as soon as her mother was gone to bed, she would tell her father every thing, a new spirit seemed to pervade her. Every now and then her heart beat rather fast, and she was a little abstracted in her manner during the evening, but upon the whole she was tranquil and unconcerned to a degree

which before she could not have conceived. Life is to us all like a succession of shower-baths. Some shiver and tremble, and holding in their hands the fatal string, look round for a means of escape, and give a slight pull, and feel the first misery of the shock, and then in fear give way, and shiver, and look, and gently pull again, and at last leave the scene of their trial, chilled and comfortless, and uninvigorated; and others rouse up their energies to face the seeming suffering, and after the first alarm is over, find that they have attained a lasting good at the expense of a momentary evil, for good that must be which at whatever price strengthens our powers of self-command, and gives us moral courage. The evening was not long, for they dined late; but it was very stupid. Family parties, when persons do not live in the same house, can scarcely fail to be so, unless all can be either quite at home, or quite visitors. Colonel Clive could be neither. He required amusement, and Mrs. Percival thought it right that he should have it, and accordingly books were forbidden when he was present. He did not care for music, but he did now and then fancy a game of backgammon, and Margaret played with him, whilst Agatha and her mother sat by, and tried to talk. The only individual at his ease was Dr. Percival, who slept as usual. Margaret observed her sister's manner, and thought she was out of spirits. She conversed, if that could be called conversation, which consisted only in short replies to Mrs. Percival's questions as to whom she had seen during the day. Her husband did not address any observations to her and looked sulky; and an outbreak of impatience when he had lost two games, made Margaret think that the storm might have been gathering some time previously. If Agatha's anger was in any way excited against him, she contrived,

however, to hide it with a very good grace. The only thing remarkable in her manner was the haste with which she put up her work, when she was sharply reminded by the Colonel that the clock had struck ten, whilst in a fretful voice she assured him that she should be ready in a very few minutes. Margaret gained some insight into the causes of this ill humour when she inquired whether Colonel Clive meant to go to London the next week, and was told "no;" that he had a sudden whim to stay at home: he had taken it into his head that farming would be a good occupation. Agatha's tone was that of annoyance, but she saw the feeling which she was betraying, and added, "it certainly is desirable for a country gentleman."

Margaret was the last person to whom Agatha would willingly have acknowledged that she looked forward to her husband's absence as a relief, and had urged it upon him so strongly as to arouse his contradictory temper, and give rise to a not very gentle matrimonial quarrel.

The hall door was closed; the night candles were brought; Mrs. Percival bade Margaret go to bed, and prepared to do the same. But the preparations took a long time, and Margaret was obliged to wait for at least twenty minutes in her own room, until she heard her mother enter her chamber, and ring the bell for her maid, and then, her heart beating quickly and faintly, she proceeded again to the drawing-room. Dr. Percival was asleep, and he might not wake up for some time. The delay would be worse than all, and Margaret coughed loudly, and moved the table, and at last let down a heavy book, and then had the painful satisfaction of seeing her father open his eyes, whilst he asked hastily, "Why she staid up so late?"

"I went upstairs when mamma told me," replied

Margaret with timidity, "but I had something to say to you, sir, and I thought I had better come down again."

"Keep it till to-morrow," muttered Dr. Percival, who, like every one else, had an instinctive dread of hearing that any person had "something to say to him."

"You are so busy in the mornings," continued Margaret; "and I think I heard you say that you must go out earlier than usual to-morrow."

"Well, make haste, let me hear."

The tone was disheartening, but Margaret's courage was in full force.

"It was about Craven, I wished to speak to you, sir."

"Craven!" Dr. Percival was now not at all sleepy; he sat upright in his chair, and Margaret wished herself a thousand miles off.

"I had a conversation with him the other night, sir," she continued. "I am afraid he has been led into difficulties again."

Dr. Percival seemed about to speak, but Margaret was resolved he should have no opportunity of venting his indignation till the whole was known. She was not partial either to taking or administering inevitable disagreeables by driblets.

"You sent him three hundred pounds, I know, sir, a little while since; but this is a great deal more, — fifteen hundred, he says, — and some of it he acknowledges from" — Margaret could not bring herself to say "gambling," so she concluded with "debts of honour."

"Debts of honour!" Dr. Percival started from his chair,—"disgrace! shame! ruin! infamous fellow! — fifteen hundred pounds! — not a penny! not a single penny shall he have!" He kicked aside a footstool, so as to upset a small table and with it a work-box,

the contents of which were immediately scattered upon the floor. Away rolled the balls of cotton to the other end of the room, and away walked Dr. Percival pushing them before him, stumbling and ejaculating, his voice raised, his eyes sparkling, his face the colour of crimson. Margaret stooped to collect the different articles, thankful for any occupation. If the case had not been so serious she might have been alive to a sense of the ridiculous, as Dr. Percival one moment knocked his foot against a reel of thread and poured forth his whole indignation upon it; and the next, and almost in the same breath, stormed at Craven as the most extravagant, good-for-nothing young man in Christendom. Having broken the ice, however, Margaret's fears had comparatively vanished, and she waited, almost with unconcern, till her father's equanimity should be in a measure recovered. This was not long. Dr. Percival's temper was very quick, and when he was in a passion he set no bounds to his expressions; but the vocabulary of abuse being at length exhausted, he turned suddenly to Margaret, and ordered her to tell him all she knew of this atrocious business. Margaret ventured no apology for her brother until she had quite finished the details, and had laid on the table the list which he had given her of his debts; and then she said, "he has given his promise, sir, that he will never touch cards or dice again; and I was to tell you so." Dr. Percival took up the paper, glanced at it, and cast it from him with an air of supreme contempt.

"I want no promises, Margaret. I would sooner trust little Juliet's promises than Craven's; you may say so from me."

"Won't you write to him, sir?"

Dr. Percival laughed bitterly. "He won't like to hear from me, I can assure you that, Margaret."

"He has done very wrong, sir, certainly; but there are so many temptations in the army."

"Don't talk to me about temptations; it is no concern of mine."

"But if you could assist him just this once, it might save him for the future," said Margaret.

The remark brought upon her the full current of her father's indignation.

"I assist him!" he exclaimed: "one would think you were an idiot. Where is the money to come from? To be picked up in the streets? Human patience cannot bear such folly!"

"We would all gladly do any thing we could, I am sure," said Margaret, meekly.

"Pshaw! rubbish! I tell you what, Margaret; you, and your mother, and Craven, are all fools together." Margaret was silent, for what could be said? "You think like a parcel of babies," continued Dr. Percival, growing cooler, as his tone became ironical; "that somewhere or other, in the Antipodes I suppose, I have a mine of gold; and that you may get from it as much money for your fripperies, and absurdities, as you choose; and I may toil like a slave all day, and it's a mere nothing — play-work. But you will know differently by and by, I warn you of that. You are on the high road to ruin, every one of you; and if you don't end your days in a workhouse, it won't be your own fault."

"We will really be very economical, sir," said Margaret.

"And what for? How will economy, as you call it, raise fifteen hundred pounds for that impudent brother of yours? Fifteen hundred pounds! it is enough to make one's hair stand on end to think of it!" Dr. Percival again took up the paper, and commented upon the different items. "'Lost at

billiards!' I'll teach him better than that. Did the young puppy think he was sent into the army to play billiards? 'Bet with Major Dawson!' his colonel shall hear of it, I vow. It's positively shameful — cheating a young fellow like him — and an old rogue who has all his wits about him! 'Tailor's bill for regimentals,'—that's your mother's doing; she taught him to be such an absurd dandy."

"There is nothing so very bad except the gambling debts," observed Margaret.

"And what would you want worse?" interrupted Dr. Percival, sharply. "We shall have you playing next, I suppose, and saying that it is nothing so very bad."

Margaret could not refrain from a smile, and a little absurdity struck her father also. His face relaxed, and sitting down by the fire, he said,—

"There is no use, Margaret, in helping Craven. Your mother knows how he has been going on ever since he went into the army; drawing upon me every year for more than his allowance, and making paltry excuses, which a man with a grain of common honesty would have been ashamed of."

"I know he has been very foolish, dear papa," said Margaret, breathing internally a sigh of relief, for she felt that the fierceness of the storm was over.

"He has been worse than foolish. I can excuse folly, but I cannot excuse deception. He ought to have come to me himself about this matter."

"Perhaps he would," said Margaret, "if I had refused; but it was very natural in him to dislike talking to you about it."

"Yes, natural enough, but that is no excuse: and the long and the short of the matter is, Margaret, that I can't help him, unless I do great injustice to my other children: I can't spend my fortune upon him."

"Agatha can be no burthen to you," said Mar-

garet, "and George, we hope, will be provided for, when he is ordained."

"Nonsense, child; don't talk so like a woman. I tell you I can't do it. Out of my income, now, I have to pay insurances to provide for your mother and you, when anything happens to me. They ought to be much larger, for you would find the sum little enough after what you have been accustomed to. Then you know full well, that my present expences are very heavy, and they will be more so when George goes to Oxford, and Philip to school: and, as for ready money, I have not a penny to spare. Craven has drained me, year after year, and the little I had just for emergencies is all to go, it seems, in the same way. And what are we to do if my practice fails?"

"There is not much chance of that, sir," said Margaret.

"But I tell you, Margaret, there is a chance, a great chance. No one can tell what may happen; and if Craven goes on in this way, and I pay his debts, some day or other I shall fall ill, or people will take a fancy to a new man, and then we shall be obliged still to keep up the insurances, and still to live, and what shall we do?"

Margaret saw that there was reason in this statement, and it opened her eyes unpleasantly to the precarious nature of her father's income. Craven's conduct appeared more unpardonable than before; that was to say, if he had really known what he was doing. But Dr. Percival's next sentence convinced her that he had involved his affairs in a mist, and that whatever her brother's faults might be, he had not been told of the extent to which they might possibly burden his family.

"Craven has always thought like the rest of you," he said; "that because we were able to live in com-

fort, and keep up a good show, therefore my fortune was made, not making. If he were to go on well it might be made, certainly; supposing, always, that my health keeps up; but if, the moment I can put by a thousand pounds, he is to run away with it, there's an end of the matter."

"If you can pay the money for him this once," said Margaret, "and tell him that you never will help him again, it may be the last time."

"It must. It is useless talking of may. If he ever spends a penny beyond his income again,—if I ever hear of his touching cards, or laying bets, I'll have nothing to say to him—nothing."

"He will not, you may be quite sure, dear papa," said Margaret in her most soothing tone.

But Dr. Percival was not to be soothed. He grumbled, and stood ready to go to bed, and yet unwilling to do so, until he had more fully expressed his sentiments, and even when at last he left the room, after giving Margaret a cold kiss, his voice was still heard as he slowly walked upstairs, venting his displeasure in a mixture of groans and reproaches. Margaret was not as much at ease as she had expected to be when the communication was over. Family affairs were becoming a serious consideration—more so than they would have been to her, if she had ever heard them explained before. But one resolution she made immediately, that Craven should know exactly the details which her father had told her, and that the children, as soon as they grew old enough, should have a clear idea of the same facts. Nothing would make them prudent if they were allowed to believe that money could be had whenever it was wanted.

CHAPTER XXXII.

For a few days after the disclosure of Craven's affairs, Margaret had a great deal to endure; yet, upon the whole, less than might have been anticipated. Dr. Percival had an easy and rather indolent disposition; it had been one of the original causes of his son's ill-regulated character, and when he had once seen his lawyer, and settled how the money was to be advanced, he turned away his thoughts from the subject, and in writing to Craven employed a tone and language of even greater mildness than was desirable. Mrs. Percival had no indolence and no easiness, but she had a great deal of maternal fondness for Craven; and the consequence was, that the fondness showed itself in a letter containing a sharp reproof at the beginning, and a full forgiveness at the end; and the anger, in repeated lectures to Margaret, and warnings that if the whole family were not strictly economical, they must be ruined. Margaret herself would have said less, and acted more. In her own mind she planned a few changes in the household arrangements, so as to put them on a less expensive footing; but Mrs. Percival never tolerated any interference in such matters, and Margaret soon saw that things were likely to go on just in the same way as before. She wrote, however, to Craven, putting the evil of his conduct shortly and clearly before him, and giving him an insight into the state of their father's affairs;

but she had little expectation that it would have any real influence over him, though it might serve to remind him of his promise. One letter was nothing; it would be thrown aside and forgotten, and it could not be expected that he would speak candidly of himself, when his confessions were to go the round of the family. Craven's answers to his parents and sister were expected with some anxiety, and when the post came in, Mrs. Percival was more than usually eager to seize and distribute the different letters.

"Strange!" she ejaculated, one morning, after emptying the contents of the post-bag on the table, preparatory to an examination of the different hands.

"Any news from Craven, mamma?" asked Margaret.

"No, my dear; very strange!"

Mrs. Percival put down the letter which she held, and Margaret saw the Countess Novera's writing. She stretched out her hand for it instinctively, but immediately drew back; for Mrs. Percival never liked to be hurried in her inspection. The other directions were scrutinized in the same way, and by the time Dr. Percival had run through two of his, Margaret received hers, with the observation —

"Who can write to you from Devonshire, my dear?"

To Margaret's great satisfaction her mother was just then called out of the room, and she took the opportunity of retiring, that she might at least have the pleasure of reading her letter at first in peace, and alone. But there was not much peace in her mind when she had concluded; rather she was perplexed in no common degree. The word "private" was written in the inside, and it was clear that the Countess had no idea that she was not perfectly at

liberty in her correspondence. The purport of the letter was to enlist Margaret's sympathy in behalf of the poor girl whom she had once visited; and her history, simple, but creating much interest was given in detail. Rhoda Newbolt had been residing in the neighbouring town of Eastlake, in the service of a family whose habits were extremely lax, and where no attention was paid to the domestics. Till the age of twenty her mind had never been turned to the subject of religion, except by her parents, who from their ultra-dissenting principles, and enthusiastic feelings, had given her a disgust towards it. A severe illness first brought her to serious thought, and whilst her notions were altogether unsettled, she became acquainted with some zealous Roman Catholics, much better educated than herself. The priest, also, had some intercourse with her, and at last succeeded in converting her. This fact was the cause of a separation from her home for many months. Its doors were closed against her, and she was told that her family would never receive her again. They had, however, at last been induced to relent, by finding that distress of mind, acting on a weak constitution, was fast sinking her in a decline. She was received by her parents, but their indignation showed itself in so violent a manner, that the girl did not venture to make any open declaration of her faith; and even the attentions offered her by the Countess Novera, upon learning her illness, were a cause of altercation and reproaches. Under these circumstances the Countess considered that it would be more in Margaret's power to be of service to her, than in that of any person who might be known to be connected with Henningsley; and she therefore intreated her to see Rhoda as frequently as she could, and to provide her with every thing which her situation might

require, at the Countess's expense. So far Margaret would have had no difficulty; but the Countess had rendered the case perplexing, by desiring that it should be kept secret from every one, lest the family should learn that Rhoda was assisted by Roman Catholics; and, at the same time, begging Margaret to continue a correspondence, which would serve to beguile the months of absence, and to give her some foretaste of the pleasure she might hope to receive again when the summer should admit of her return to Henningsley. Nothing could have been more interesting or flattering to Margaret than the prospect of such an intercourse, but how was it to be carried on? There were many ways of secrecy open to her. She might send her letters privately, or take them herself to the post-office, and she might arrange that the answers should be kept till she could call for them; and this she might have vindicated, by saying that the comfort of another person was involved in it, and that her mother's scrutiny forced her into deception; but great as the temptation was, since it gave her a hope of retaining the hold which she had already gained upon the Countess's regard, Margaret did not for a moment think of yielding to it. She went at once to her mother, and told her that the Countess had written to her upon a matter of business, and that she was not at liberty to show the letter. Mrs. Percival's desire of confidence was, in the present instance, neutralized by her pleasure in the friendship which her daughter had formed; and Margaret was allowed to send her answer without any questionings. But she wrote it sadly, under the belief that it would put a stop to any future correspondence. 'It could not be otherwise than delightful to herself,' she said in her letter, 'to write to, or hear from, the Countess; and her wishes, with re-

gard to the poor girl, would willingly be attended to, but she should be wrong in concealing from her the knowledge that she was not at liberty to keep any such subjects from her mother. If she might name the girl's case to Mrs. Percival, she was certain that the secret would still be perfectly safe. But if the Countess objected to this, she would prefer placing the pleasure of being her almoner in other hands.' The reply to this request came by return of post. It brought a full permission for Margaret to say as much or as little as she chose, though still urging concealment from all other persons; and again the desire of continuing the correspondence was expressed, but it was not as warmly as at first. The Countess appeared to write under some restraint, though it was not sufficient to induce her to relinquish the former idea altogether. Margaret's sincerity was a safeguard against temptation at that time, for the Countess was prevented from saying many things which might have prejudiced her mind further in favour of the Romish Church; and if Mrs. Percival had known the facts, she would probably have brought this forward as an illustration of the wisdom of her own conduct. But one instance of good resulting from a certain line of action, can scarcely be a sufficient argument for its general adoption. Margaret's high principles and straight-forward honesty of disposition alone saved her from being led into a course of deception. Where she had stood firm, nine out of ten would have fallen. Certainly, there was not one of her sisters, who, under similar trial, would not have gained her object by evasion. Agatha would have given way from wilfully shutting her eyes to the fact that she was doing wrong; Harriet, from an unsteady mind; and Grace, from perverseness. Happily the temptation presented itself to one who

was able to bear it, and the evil was avoided; but Mrs. Percival had no reason to give herself credit for the circumstance.

The dreary month of November, as it is so often called, passed over with little external to mark its progress. There were leaden skies and dingy pasture lands, and fallen leaves, and sighing winds — and some persons shrank from the cold blast, and clinging to their firesides, foretold a severe winter; and others complained of the mournfulness of the season, and tried to gain cheerfulness by more frequent visits to their neighbours. Miss Debrett was of this number. In November, she was almost certain to be at the Grove every other day in the week, and Margaret's patience was often severely tested in consequence. But on one point they had now a common sympathy. Rhoda Newbolt's sister had been approved by Mrs. Percival; and Miss Debrett's compassion was fully engaged by her maid's description in behalf of the sick girl. Though she could not walk to see her, she worked for her, and contrived little methods of giving her ease, which, if not always wise or successful, were, at least, kind-hearted, and afforded Margaret many excuses for going to the cottage frequently. The truth, as to her religion, was not clearly known; and since Mrs. Percival did not consider there was any harm in doing so much for her, Miss Debrett saw no reason why she should.

Margaret scarcely understood the attraction which drew her to the cottage. She sometimes tried to analyse it; but it was of a very complex nature. There was a certain charm in the slight mystery thrown over it; a greater in the fact that it was a link between herself and the Countess; and something independent of both these in the character of the girl herself. It seemed sometimes

impossible that Rhoda could have been brought up in humble life by coarse-minded, ill-educated parents. She was like her mother in features, and had, probably, once been like her also in temper; for there was an impetuosity of spirit called forth by even slight opposition, though sobered and controlled by great physical weakness and religious principle; but in other respects few characters could have exhibited a stronger contrast. One was sordid, and at times hypocritical; the other was generous and sincere. Rhoda's intellect was of a very superior cast; she had by nature an ardent imagination, and, when excited, her language became almost eloquent. Her mind was one which only required cultivation to render it very powerful, and there is a cultivation sometimes fostered on the bed of sickness, and in the prospect of approaching death, which will outstrip the most strenuous efforts of refinement. Margaret had never before watched so plainly the struggle between good and evil; the spirit of a fallen nature, and the spirit of Divine grace. There could be no doubt of Rhoda's sincerity. Her candour, and simplicity, and enthusiasm, were evident in all she said; and even in the fits of moody reserve, to which Margaret occasionally was witness, there was a consciousness of error, and a self-reproach, which, when added to her state of suffering, rendered it very difficult to condemn her. In contrast to a vulgar, harsh mother, and a cold, money-getting father, Rhoda seemed like a creature of a different world; and in private, on the very few occasions when Margaret was not accompanied by the children, and when some fortunate circumstance called Mrs. Newbolt and her youngest child from home, she succeeded in breaking down the barrier raised by difference of rank and education, and gained a glimpse of fears, and hopes, and endea-

vours, which placed the daughter of the ignorant mechanic completely on a level with herself. At such moments the common nature was every thing. Distinctions of rank were forgotten, and, what was far more important, distinctions of religion also. It was this which was Margaret's danger. The minutes passed with the poor girl were comparatively few and transient, but they were spent, as it were, on the borders of eternity. Great suffering alone will inspire reverence; and when it must almost inevitably be followed by death, the reverence increases to awe. We look even on a sick child with feelings very different from those with which we regard it in health; and when Margaret listened to the fervent, humble, though wild and enthusiastic expressions of Rhoda Newbolt, she could not judge her, and think of her as having embraced a religion of error. She did not dare to condemn a piety which appeared more earnest than her own. To Margaret such intercourse was also more ensnaring than it would have been in many other cases, because it brought before her vividly, for the first time, the certainty of mortality, and forced her to look into her own heart, and inquire how she could bear the prospect of death. When the answer came in shuddering terror, and her thoughts reverted to Rhoda's bed of suffering, the wish would often arise in her breast that she might at her last hour be enabled to cast all her burden of sin upon a fellow being, as Rhoda acknowledged that she did, when, after having made her confession to the priest, he had granted her full absolution. This had been the object of Father Andrea's visit; and Rhoda's only fear seemed now to be lest her mother's temper, and hatred of her creed, should be the means of debarring her from the last offices of religion when her hour of departure should arrive.

If these were performed, her soul, she said, would be safe. Margaret hinted at the dread of purgatory; but Father Andrea had promised that masses should be said for Rhoda after her death; and upon this promise she rested in confidence. To a conscience like Margaret's, anxious and tender, and easily wrought upon by imagination, this sense of safety was more inviting than any other tenet of Romanism. She reasoned upon it sometimes; but her arguments, like her wishes, all went in its favour; or rather her wishes biassed her arguments, so that she could not see that this assurance of salvation was but the doctrine of ultra-dissent under another form; the wish to escape from all doubt as to our final acceptance, by making either a feeling of our own mind, or the outward act of a fellow creature, the certain undoubted sign of that full forgiveness which is hidden amongst the secrets of God.

"I could wish to think as you do, Rhoda," she said, after a short private conversation, when the suffering girl had described the way with which she now looked back upon the follies of her past life, as no longer a part of herself;—"for I should not be happy like you if I were lying in the same state."

"No;" and Rhoda stretched out her thin fingers, and held Margaret's hand affectionately; "but you will come to think it before you die, Miss Percival. I have prayed many a time that it may be so. You will be a Catholic before long, though I may not see it; and you will remember me then; and, as you are rich, you will be kind to me after my death, and ask Father Andrea to say some more masses that I may be quite safe."

The last words neutralized the effect of the former ones: they showed Margaret, what she was

constantly in the habit of overlooking, that Rhoda's peace was built on an unsafe foundation, even if her creed were true. Her mind was instantly sent forth on a sea of perplexity. Rest,—that was what she longed for,—rest from the harassing remembrances of past sins ; from the difficulties of the present hour ; from the dread of the unknown future. At one moment it seemed as if Romanism would give it: the next, a veil seemed lifted up, and a dark scene of suffering was laid open before her, in which the hope of mitigation lay in the prayers of those who might be weak, and forgetful, and poor in worldly goods, and might take little account of the sorrows of the friends whom death had hidden from their sight. Margaret had still to learn that the deep tides of the Jordan can never cease to flow between the toils of the wilderness and the rest of the Land of Promise.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

And whilst all these thoughts were passing in Margaret's mind, where was Mr. Sutherland? Week after week went by, and little communication was held with him, except through an occasional interchange of notes, often hurried on his part; on Margaret's, unconsciously reserved. Mr. Sutherland was busy in his parish, labouring devotedly and unobtrusively in the great cause to which at his ordination he had pledged himself. Something of the fruit of his labours could be seen in the increased attendance of his people upon public worship, the better management of their homes, and the more orderly behaviour of their children; but there was nothing which would have satisfied Margaret, when contrasted with Father Andrea's account of the wonderful success of the Jesuits. It was true that from her own experience she might have learned that the labour of turning hearts to God is the labour of a life; that even when education, talent, and a determined will co-operate, the work seems often destined to be a failure; and she might therefore have looked with patience upon the very gradual, sometimes scarcely perceptible improvement effected by the efforts of a zealous clergyman; but her eye could not accurately distinguish between what has been aptly termed "the galvanic life of Jesuitism,"—a life infused and supported from without; and, the inward, independent principle, which acts by itself, and is derived only from God. Even

to have lived in her uncle's parish, to have seen what now she knew principally by hearsay, and, consequently, scarcely realized, might not have been sufficient for her; for her faith was too weak to estimate rightly "the day of small things." Mr. Sutherland, in the mean time, dwelt fondly upon the idea that Margaret was at length becoming all that he could most desire. He saw the improvement which had taken place in her tone of mind, and he gathered from her notes that she was sedulously pursuing her duties. She sometimes spoke of her books; mentioned the pleasure which she had derived from Massillon, and the attention which was required to understand the reasoning of Pascal; but there was nothing in this to excite any alarm; and her uncle, in return, would now and then beg her to look at the passages which were his favourites, whilst he frequently expressed his satisfaction at finding that she could take an interest in such studies. The works in themselves were not only innocuous, but salutary; yet a fatal bias towards Romanism might convert them into poison.

It was on New Year's Day that Mr. Sutherland again appeared at the Grove. There was to be a family meeting, enlivened only by Miss Debrett, and without him Margaret would have greatly disliked the idea. She could not help disliking every event which brought Agatha and Colonel Clive to the house; and more especially when, as on the present occasion, they were to be accompanied by Mrs. St. Aubyn. The want of harmony at Ashington it now required no great insight to perceive; and the disease was spreading, although in particular instances, as in the case of the first dispute regarding the servant it had been warded off. The Colonel changed his mind then, and kept his man, so that nothing further was said at the time; but there

were numberless ways of putting Agatha out of humour; and although the annoyance was very quietly shown, it still was shown, and her spite was vented upon all things and people belonging to her husband. His sister was, of course, not excepted. Colonel Clive liked Mrs. St. Aubyn's society, because her gossip amused him. Agatha could not endure it, because it was accompanied by an intrusion into her own peculiar province. Mrs. St. Aubyn would suggest, and make remarks, and Colonel Clive generally approved, and sometimes insisted that the suggestions should be carried out. Agatha always rebelled, coldly, silently, but very obstinately; and the differences did not cease with the day's visit. They were sometimes carried on for a week; and at length only terminated by a vehement burst from Colonel Clive, followed by a declaration that he would be master in his own house, which sent Agatha to her room, to complain of a bad headache, and refuse to appear at dinner. Perhaps the affair was smoothed over at last, by its being assumed, on her part, to be of no consequence; but, in reality, the defeat rankled in her breast, and with it the determination to be revenged upon her husband and his sister the very first opportunity. Colonel Clive's selfishness was irritated by this conduct. His marriage had been one of taste and expediency. Agatha's coldness did not affect him, for he had long passed the age of romantic love; and what he did not feel, he did not expect. She was young, and beautiful, and apparently gentle-tempered and obedient; his fancy, not his heart, was touched, though during the period of suspense he certainly did show as much tenderness as was possible for a man whose first and last object in life was his own individual comfort; but when his point was gained, Agatha's power was over. Her only hope of domestic peace

would then have arisen from implicit obedience. Margaret perceived this, and if her sister had ever approached the subject, she would have hinted it; but Agatha was still proudly reserved. She would not believe that others could see what she did not choose to acknowledge; and however great her wretchedness might be, she preferred rather to bear it in solitude, than to seek for sympathy by confessing an error. Margaret owned her fears to her uncle when they met, and he began to inquire into the state of the Ashington affairs, hoping that he might point out some mode of being useful; but Mr. Sutherland found he could not advise.

"There is no power given us," he said, "to interfere between a husband and wife; and if we assume it, we may injure ourselves, but we shall not benefit them: so, Margaret, my dear, rest contented if you can. Persons do foolish things, and they must suffer."

"I doubt sometimes whether Agatha does suffer sufficiently," replied Margaret; "I could almost wish that she did."

"We won't talk about Agatha, but about you, Margaret; you are not looking well."

"I don't know why I should not," said Margaret; "I don't feel ill at all."

"Perhaps it is worn, rather than ill. If you were an under-graduate at Oxford, I should say you had been reading and thinking too much."

"I have but little time for reading," replied Margaret; "but thinking follows one every where."

"A certain kind of thought does, which is practical and wholesome, and just sufficient to keep one's actions right; but not the thought which would make a cheek look white, like yours."

"They are puzzles, not thoughts, which do that," said Margaret.

"Puzzles, which seem to grow up in consequence of our actions? Well, I can feel with you there; but what are they?"

"Not now," exclaimed Margaret, and her face brightened into a smile; "just see!—ten minutes to six, and the dressing-bell rang at half-past five; and if you and I were to begin talking now, we should not have finished till the dessert was on the table."

She ran off to her own room. The excuse was good; but she had not been sorry to make it. Some of her puzzles it would be difficult to mention: in fact, there was not one which she could definitely fix upon, and she hoped Mr. Sutherland would not allude to them again. The evening passed in its ordinary way, agreeably to Margaret, because her uncle was present; disagreeably, because she was sorry that he should see the sulky coldness existing between Agatha and her husband. The children sat up later than usual, and Miss Debrett assisted in playing magic music, which served a little to enliven the dulness in consequence of two disappointments. One was, that George, who had left Eton, and, after spending Christmas Day with a school-fellow, was to have returned home immediately, had petitioned for a longer leave of absence, and was not expected till the following week; and the other, that Mrs. Percival was not in her usual spirits, — she had tried to have a party, and had failed. The invitations had been sent too late, and every one had been engaged. Miss Debrett alone compassionated her. She was sure that all who had declined must be uncommonly vexed. There could be no such pleasant evenings at any other house. She spoke confidently, from experience. The brightly lighted, well-furnished drawing-room at the Grove, with the sound of the piano and harp,

the children's merry voices, Mrs. Percival's patient attention, and Margaret's careful efforts for her comfort, were in strong contrast to the loneliness of her small parlour, and one candle, and never-failing flannel work; the only thing which she could see to do at night, and with which she was supplied whenever the charitable societies had any to dispose of. Mrs. St. Aubyn did not feel with Miss Debrett: she remembered the festivities of a New Year's Day which she had spent abroad, and secretly lamented that the English want of vivacity prevented them from introducing any similar amusements.

"Ashington," she said, aloud, "would be such a nice house for French entertainments she thought she should talk to her brother about it next year."

"I hope we shall be spending our winter in the north then," observed Agatha. "This part of the country is unutterably dull."

"Nay, my dear," said Mrs. Percival, "you have the least right of any one to complain of dulness. Just remember how you have been dining out, on an average, three times a week, since your marriage."

"And your parties at home too, my love," pursued Miss Debrett. "Don't you think, now, Mrs. St. Aubyn, that Agatha is a very gay young bride?"

"Very: my brother is quite longing for a little quiet. I tell him he ought not to have his parties all at once. He should spread them over a larger surface."

Agatha pouted, and took up her work, and Mrs. St. Aubyn went on describing what she should do if she were in Agatha's place; how many persons she should ask at one time, what arrangements she should make; and at last, when Colonel Clive came

into the room, urging upon him the propriety of changing his intention of giving a dance immediately, since there had been so much visiting lately, that it would be thought nothing of. Margaret could not help being a little amused at the scene. Mrs. St. Aubyn was perfectly innocent of all intentional unkindness; yet every word she said was, in Agatha's eyes, a crime; and at last, to increase the harmony, Miss Debrett drew her chair near Agatha, and congratulated her in an audibly low voice upon having such an admirable sister-in-law; "so thoughtful, and so well informed upon all such points: it must be a peculiar comfort to her."

"Peculiar, indeed!" repeated Agatha, scarcely moving her lips, and she turned to speak to her uncle.

Mr. Sutherland's eyes met Margaret's, and a smile played upon both their lips; yet it was soon gone, and Margaret wished that there had been no real evil lurking beneath these little traits of character, so that she might have been at liberty thoroughly to enjoy them. The party broke up rather late after the proper ceremonies of eating cake, and drinking wine, and wishing healths for the New Year, had been gone through. Miss Debrett expressed her warm thanks for a most delightful evening, the termination proving particularly satisfactory to her, as it consisted in being conveyed home in Mrs. St. Aubyn's carriage, instead of wrapping herself up in a cloak and furs, and being escorted on foot by Dr. Percival's servant, to her own door. Margaret went to her room not at all sleepy, but rather tired; her fire blazed cheerfully, and she had a fancy for a quarter of an hour's reading. But the sermon of Massillon which she wished to finish, was on the drawing-room table, and she was obliged to go down stairs again to fetch it.

Dr. Percival had retired to bed, but Mr. Sutherland was still there. He held in his hand the very volume for which she was seeking; Margaret glanced at it, and a thought crossed her whether her uncle had noticed the name at the title-page; she was going away again, but Mr. Sutherland felt guilty by a sort of instinct.

"You want this, my dear Margaret? I had only just taken it up."

"Oh, no, no," said Margaret; "keep it pray. To-morrow will do just as well."

"For me, certainly it will. I would much rather not have it, except that if I give it to you, you will be tempted to sit up late, and then your white cheek will become still more white."

Margaret peeped over his shoulder. "What were you reading?" she asked.

"I was not reading, only refreshing my memory by skimming. There is so much to do in these days with our own divines, that there is no time left for those of a foreign communion."

"Sur les Elus," repeated Margaret, as she read the title at the top of the page. "I have not come to that yet."

"It is a splendid sermon, and they say, that when it was preached, it had such an effect upon the people that they all stood up in the Church, at one particular part."

"When will it be so amongst us?" said Margaret, but the words were scarcely spoken, when she wished them unsaid.

"Never, until our national character is changed. Massillon was a Frenchman, addressing a French audience. No eloquence would have the same outward effect upon the reserved English."

"I don't like that kind of reasoning away of enthusiasm," said Margaret. "The moment I hear any

one begin to philosophize, and account for feelings, the feelings themselves seem to me to have no existence."

"And yet to a certain extent we must reason, and reason coldly; perhaps, I ought to say dispassionately. If we do not, just imagine the fanaticism and credulity which will follow."

"Then you think the feelings which Massillon called forth by his sermon, were a mere effervescence?"

"Nay, I would on no account judge so hardly, in fact, I would not judge at all. The eloquence was undoubtedly very impressive, the feelings were probably very sincere; but they are no more to be taken as a proof of the really good effects of the sermon, than the sudden raptures of the ranters can be considered a sign of the truth of the doctrines which they hold. In all cases where we see great demonstrations of public feeling, or even when we hear such facts as the Romanists are accustomed to put forth of the extent of their conversions in heathen countries, we are bound, not so much to distrust the facts themselves, as to exercise our reason in drawing our conclusions from them."

"Reason may be very well, but faith seems better," said Margaret. She put down her candle, willing to remain longer, for the conversation was taking a turn which interested her.

"Right reason and true faith can never be separated;" replied Mr. Sutherland. "Reason is given to enable us to judge of the authority to which we are to submit, and when once that authority has been determined, it will of itself point out that our faith must be implicit. So reason proves the being of a God, and its highest effort can then only bring us to exercise the most childlike faith. Now no reason can force us to give full credence to wonder-

ful stories of sudden conversions, to a great extent, because we know that the fact of their being sincere is only to be proved by time and careful inquiries."

"But they do show an amazing power," said Margaret, "and the effects of the sudden impression were often lasting."

"Undoubtedly, but what would you argue from this?"

"At first sight, I should say that the doctrines promulgated were true," replied Margaret, whilst her colour rather deepened, and the idea suggested itself of mentioning the conversation with Father Andrea. It was negatived, however, directly, by the fear of betraying the circumstances of their meeting, and the interest taken by the Countess in Rhoda Newbolt.

"If power is the test of truth," replied Mr. Sutherland, "then Mahometanism is true in the East, and Christianity in the West."

"And so you would not think the astonishing success of the Jesuits any argument in their favour?" asked Margaret.

Mr. Sutherland looked at her with slight surprise, but there was no distrust in his mind. He thought that she was only arguing for the sake of information. "It can be no real evidence for, or against them," he replied; "because truth is independent of the effect which we see it produce. I may set before two men the truth that almsgiving is a duty; one may be naturally generous, and may give me at once the tenth of his fortune: the other may be penurious, and refuse to give me any thing, but the truth itself cannot be affected by the conduct of either."

"Yet how can great moral effects be produced without truth?" inquired Margaret,

"In the case of the Jesuits," replied Mr. Sutherland, "if I were arguing strictly, I might require you to prove that they had worked great moral effects; but we will take it for granted that they have done so. Now I quite agree with you that good can only be effected by the exhibition of truth, and I think we shall find, on inquiry, that the influence of all religious schemes has resulted originally from the truth contained in them. Mahomet taught the unity of the Godhead, and the necessity of obedience to the moral law; that was the foundation of his power. Its extent depended upon climate, national character, individual talent, personal bravery, and other accidental circumstances."

"I wish you would leave Mahometanism and talk of Christianity," said Margaret. "Have not the Jesuits done more than any body of men towards making converts to Christianity; and if they have, ought we not to believe that their principles are the right ones?"

"As to your first question," replied Mr. Sutherland, "it is one which can never be decided until the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be known. How far the converts, made by the Jesuits were sincere, no person can presume to say. If the conversions were only nominal, or if the greater part of them were so, your argument would at once fall to the ground. But assuming every one to have been real, I would ask you, since you reject Mahometanism, to turn to England in the time of Wesley. There were conversions, not indeed from nominal but practical heathenism, sudden—numerous—many of them, as far as we can say, very real. If power is the test of truth, Wesleyanism is as true in England as Jesuitism in other countries."

Margaret was thoughtful; at length she said: "Then what would you attribute to the Jesuits?"

"Great zeal," replied Mr. Sutherland; "great devotion to the cause of their order, which they identified with the cause of Christianity, and great knowledge of the human heart, obtained by the practice of confession. Under peculiar circumstances such a system as theirs could not fail of success; but as the circumstances have varied, so has the success likewise. You do not agree with me, I see," he added, looking at Margaret with a half smile: "You think I am prejudiced."

"No, indeed; my reason can go with you, but not my feelings. Very womanish, is it not?"

"Rather so, I must own; but I wish you would accustom yourself to look at such subjects at a distance. Of course I can have no fear whatever of your having any leaning towards Romanism; but it is a very unsafe habit of mind to be led away by feeling so as to form too charitable a judgment. Give all the credit for virtues and sincerity that you reasonably can; but remember it is not fair to allow yourself to be dazzled by a number of facts broadly asserted. You support one cause at the expense of another."

"The Jesuit facts do not meet one very often," said Margaret, "but when they do they are startling."

"Yes, and the misfortune is that persons imbibe a strong prejudice in early youth, without at all knowing the foundation; they afterwards stumble suddenly upon some book, or argument, which shows them that their opinions were exaggerated; and then, by a natural re-action, they go as wildly into the contrary extreme."

"I confess," said Margaret, with the candour which formed so prominent a trait in her character, "that is my case very often."

"And a false argument is injurious to its own cause," pursued Mr. Sutherland. "If you were still to uphold that the Jesuit system is good because, in some cases, it has produced great results, I could turn round upon you, and say, that in others it has produced small results; and therefore in those instances it was not good."

"But that was from accidental circumstances," exclaimed Margaret, eagerly.

Mr. Sutherland smiled. "I have caught you in the trap, at last, Margaret," he said. "Once grant that accidental circumstances can render a system nugatory, and you admit the very point for which I have been arguing; that principles are true or false independent of their effects. If you, taking the part of the Jesuits, say that I have no reason to declare they were wrong, because they were sometimes unsuccessful; you must allow me to say that you have no reason to declare they were right, because they were sometimes or even frequently the contrary. So now having come to an amicable conclusion, I must suggest that it is past eleven o'clock and time to go to bed."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MARGARET went to her room dissatisfied; and so she arose the next morning. Her uncle's cool arguments had shaken, if not destroyed, a sort of mysterious romance in which, without being exactly aware of it, she had lately indulged. Father Andrea's glowing descriptions of the Jesuits had caught her imagination, and whenever she had time for a reverie or a day-dream, it was generally connected with them. Theirs seemed the power which was destined again to work miracles for Christianity; and, as she had no thought of becoming a Romanist, it seemed perfectly innocent to indulge in admiration of a part of the system. But what romance could stand against Mr. Sutherland's dispassionate reasoning? If he had inveighed strongly against them, she could have borne it; but to feel that he allowed so much of zeal and wisdom, and yet that his judgment was not biassed in their favour, was in no ordinary degree provoking. It was still more trying, because Mr. Sutherland was a man whom no one could, for an instant, accuse of coldness, or want of earnestness. Margaret knew, perhaps better than any one else, his sensitive quickness of feeling, and depth of devotion. He was not naturally what is called a cool judging person. He was poetical, excitable, keenly alive to external beauty; he had many of the qualities of which an enthusiast is formed; but he had also a clear intellect, and the first use which he had made

of it was to exercise it in reasoning, that it might serve as a balance to his imagination. Margaret possessed much in common with him, but her education had been defective in the one point on which she most needed culture and care. She had very good common sense; but it was innate, not brought out by cultivation. When she did reason, she frequently was correct; but her quickness and cleverness made her generally take the easier mode of jumping to conclusions by intuition; and as these conclusions were often proved to be right, she saw no exact reason for distrusting the process by which they had been reached. But the intuition which may guide us in safety in the ordinary affairs of life, is not sufficient for religion. Error there is most dangerous, and too often irretrievable. It is a question in which so much is involved, both for time and eternity, that we cannot innocently risk a false step. If we enter rashly upon the task of examination — if we undertake to judge for ourselves whilst ignorant of the facts upon which we are to decide, or if we allow an over-wrought imagination to bias our minds, the faults are moral faults, not simply intellectual; and as such we must one day answer for them. Margaret's reason was convinced by her uncle's arguments, but her feelings struggled against the conviction. Yet she was not disinclined to pursue the subject, for she thought it might give clearness to her ideas.

Mr. Sutherland's principles were evidently fixed. As a clergyman of the English Church, he spoke as undoubtingly as Father Andrea; and Margaret knew him too well to believe that he would do this if he were in any way uncertain as to his ground.

It happened on the following morning that Mr. Sutherland came into the school-room whilst Grace was reading her English history. She was wading

through the details of the Commonwealth, — not well understanding the exact words which she uttered, and still less comprehending the purposes of the different parties, or why one was better or worse than the other. Mr. Sutherland stood by, listening for a few minutes, and Margaret wished him away, for his presence made the child nervous, and her blunders became ludicrous. She thought he must perceive this, but he kept his ground until Grace had finished; and then calling her to him, he said, playfully:

"Why, Grace, you have been reading of a great many naughty people, all quarrelling and fighting. What was the matter with them?"

"I don't know, uncle," said Grace. "I never do know about them, there were so many."

"I dare say Harriet can tell, then," said Mr. Sutherland; "she knows all about Charles the First and Oliver Cromwell, I am sure."

"I know a little about King Charles having his head cut off," answered Harriet.

"Yes, and more than that, Harriet," said Margaret. "You used to remember the names of all the battles, and the chief generals, and what the disputes between the King and the Parliament arose from."

"But I have forgotten now," said Harriet; "because I have been reading the Roman history since."

"You can tell me something, I dare say," observed Mr. Sutherland. "Do you know which side the Bishops were?"

"On the King's," replied Harriet.

"And did Oliver Cromwell and his friends like the Bishops?"

"No," said Grace, quickly. "I read last week that they could not bear them."

"And I think they would not let them sit in Parliament, and make laws," continued Harriet.

"Right, both of you. Oliver Cromwell and his friends hated the Bishops. But I wonder whether it was right in them to do it. Were the Bishops bad men?"

"I don't think they were," said Harriet; "but it does not say much about them."

"Bishops are clergymen," said Mr. Sutherland; "chief clergymen—higher than all others; so I dare say they were good. What could have been the reason for Oliver Cromwell's hating them?"

The children did not know what to answer.

"I think," continued Mr. Sutherland, "that the people in those days were fond of having their own way; and did not like to repeat prayers out of a book, as they were ordered, when they went to church, but wanted to say whatever came into their heads; and I think also that many of them wished to stand up and preach sermons, though they had never learnt to do it; and they knew that if they had Bishops to make rules for them about religion, they should not be able to follow their own fancies. Was that right in them?"

"No, very wrong," said Harriet.

"Very wrong, indeed! But then, why was it wrong? why ought they to have attended to the rules which the Bishops made?"

Harriet made no reply.

"Who first ordered that there should be Bishops?" continued her uncle.

"I think there is something about them in the Bible," said Harriet; and she took hers from the book-case.

"They are mentioned several times," said Mr. Sutherland: "but the Apostles were the first Bishops; now who chose them?"

"Our Saviour," replied Harriet.

"Yes; and therefore you see why it was so wrong in Oliver Cromwell and the people who rebelled against King Charles to hate the Bishops: because they were hating persons whom God had ordered to govern them in all things belonging to their religion."

"But they were not the Apostles who lived in Oliver Cromwell's time," remarked Grace.

"Oh, Grace!" exclaimed Harriet.

"Nay, there is nothing to be ashamed of," said Mr. Sutherland kindly, as he saw the colour mount to the child's cheek. "They were not the Apostles indeed, Grace, because we know that they could not have lived so long; but before the Apostles died, they ordained persons to succeed them, and govern as they had done in all church matters; and before those persons died, they ordained others, and so it has gone on to this present time. Oliver Cromwell did not hate the Apostles, because they were not living; but he did hate the persons who had come after them, and whom he ought rather to have obeyed and loved."

"And King Charles liked the Bishops," said Grace.

"Yes, he liked them very much; and there he was right, though he might have been wrong in other ways. I wonder which we resemble most, King Charles or Oliver Cromwell?"

"I never saw a Bishop," said Harriet, "so I don't know."

"But there is a picture of one in papa's room," observed Grace: "and it is a very pretty picture; much prettier than this ugly old Oliver Cromwell," she added, turning to the stern Puritan features, pictured in the frontispiece of her history.

"A cogent reason for admiration, certainly," said

Mr. Sutherland, looking at Margaret, who had been an attentive listener to the conversation.

"I believe there are not very many in the world who would give a better," she replied.

"No," said Mr. Sutherland. "We have learnt to take such a lamentably low view of the claims of the Church; but I must not interrupt you longer."

"Don't go," exclaimed Margaret, stopping him. "The children have just finished: never mind your books, my dears, I will put them away presently. You may run in the garden now, if you like it, till dinner-time."

The children hastened to avail themselves of the permission, and when they had left the room Mr. Sutherland said, "I could be half angry with you, Margaret, for not giving your pupils better Church principles."

"The governess must have them herself first," said Margaret.

"But you don't mean to say that you can ever look favourably upon the religious principles of the Roundheads?"

"Not as a matter of taste decidedly," she answered; "but in point of estimation I really do not see why they were not just as good as the Cavaliers: they were equally sincere."

"We will put aside the political question," said Mr. Sutherland. "Charles may have been weak, and there were certainly extenuating circumstances in favour of the Roundheads; but as a question of religious truth there can be no doubt, unless you entirely throw aside the authority of the English Church."

"There is so much to be said on both sides," replied Margaret: "equal zeal, equal bravery, equal sincerity; and if you speak of moral goodness, the

advantage certainly is on the side of the Roundheads."

"But, my dear Margaret, what have all these things to do with truth? If the Cavaliers had been the most pusillanimous, despicable set of men that ever lived, their cause, so far as it was the cause of the Church, would have been a right one. You are arguing just as you did last night in favour of the Jesuits."

"I don't know how to argue," said Margaret, smiling.

"No, my dear, I really do not think you do. Your mode of reasoning is just that which proves that every thing is true in turn."

"But the English Church cannot surely take such very high ground," said Margaret. "It is established by law in England, but it is not the same in Scotland."

"Law can have nothing to do with it," replied her uncle. "The law does not make the Church. If to-morrow an act of Parliament were to pass to establish Presbyterianism, or Unitarianism, or any other 'ism,' it could not affect the claims of the Church upon our obedience, any more than the conversion of half England by the Jesuits could do it. The authority of the Church, not *of* England but *in* England, rests upon its being a true branch of the Catholic Church, governed by bishops who have descended from the Apostles; holding the primitive faith, and providing for the due administration of the sacraments."

"And Presbyterianism in Scotland?" began Margaret.

"Has no more right to our allegiance there than it has in England. For fifteen hundred years the Church was governed by a succession of bishops, and no one thought of disputing their authority;

and if persons wilfully throw off this government, they reject the constitution of the Church, and we must not sanction their worship."

"And what, if they are good men?" asked Margaret.

"Honour them as such; give them credit for every virtue which belongs to them, in the same way as you would look charitably upon the Jesuits; but never sacrifice truth to a desire of having peace or unity. Especially, never do injury to your Church by placing her power on the low ground of being established by law."

Margaret was a little conscience-stricken when she remembered the defence which she had made to Father Andrea. Mr. Sutherland perceived her change of manner, and was afraid lest he had spoken too warmly. "These subjects carry one away," he said, "and all the more because one feels that the Church is now so helpless; oppressed by the state, and suffering from the weakness of her members."

"The weakness of her members you may well say," observed Margaret. "Look at the working of the Church in this place."

"Look at ourselves, Margaret; — there lies the great weakness, — that which concerns us most."

Margaret's affection made her think what her uncle would not have borne to hear in words. Her reverence for him was returning in its original force, and at that moment she could see no weakness in him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE following morning brought a letter from the Countess. Margaret was afraid lest her uncle might hear her mother's exclamation:—"From Devonshire, Margaret, so you will be pleased!" But Mr. Sutherland was engaged by a correspondent of his own, and did not notice it, and Mrs. Percival recollected immediately that it was better to make no observations, since she was bound to secrecy on the subject upon which the Countess generally wrote. This letter, however, was different from the few which Margaret had lately received; it was more unreserved, and gave many particulars of the life which Beatrice was then leading. A tone of melancholy ran through it, which was not unusual; but the depression of spirits, under which the Countess owned she was then labouring, appeared to arise less from sad recollections than from dissatisfaction with her present mode of life. "My thoughts often travel to Henningsley," she wrote,—after describing the festivities of the Christmas parties, — "and I sometimes fancy that the loneliness of the old house would be more soothing and better for me than the gaiety of this place. I was at least useful there: here, I can do nothing but what is called enjoy myself; and enjoyment is often out of my power. I am inclined to think sometimes that it is not in the power of any one. I cannot see how it is to be obtained by forgetfulness, and yet half the people I meet seem to have no thought. One thing in par-

ticular they can do without, which persons brought up in the faith of the Catholic Church cannot. They live, apparently (for I would not be uncharitable), without laws or guidance. I miss the times and seasons, the Church services, the holy days, which in Italy mark the year as it passes. You may perhaps wonder at my saying this when I have spoken of Christmas feastings; but I know you will agree, that although mirth is a very proper adjunct to seasons of sacred joy, it should not wholly occupy our minds. Lucia sympathizes with me; but she is young, and the attractions of society are naturally great; and if it were not for the company of Father Andrea, I should indeed at times be very lonely. Even this I am often deprived of, as he has friends in the neighbourhood with whom he passes a great portion of his time."

"Times and seasons, Church services and holy days," repeated Margaret to herself, as she took the road towards Rhoda Newbolt's cottage, having purposely allowed the children to go out with Mr. Sutherland. "Yes, in such things even my uncle must allow that the English Church is deficient." —"And laws also,—where were they to be found?"

The life of a Roman Catholic she believed to be regulated even in its minutest details: the life of a member of the English Church seemed to be that which was good in the sight of each individual. Margaret had begun to think of late that rules are not only essential to happiness, but that the desire of acting according to them is so innate in the human mind as to force many into a servile obedience, under the guise of perfect liberty. She had seen a few instances of this in the conduct of Rhoda's parents, professing unlimited freedom of opinion, yet submitting implicitly to the teacher whom they had chosen, and desirous of bringing every one else

under subjection to the same yoke. Sometime she could reason speculatively upon the subject, as upon any other; but now it came home to her more practically. She was annoyed that her uncle should have found the children deficient in a knowledge of Church history and authority, and the defect was, she felt, to be traced to her own education. She had never been taught to think of the Church, and it was natural that she should not know how to teach them. From the little which she had seen of Romanists, Margaret could understand how it was, that Church principles formed so prominent a part of their opinions. They were worked into their daily life. Rhoda Newbolt understood scarcely any thing of the history of Romanism; it was not to be supposed that she could; but she said a certain number of prayers, at certain hours, and had certain days marked out for especial devotions, and thus had a better knowledge of the authority of the Church than could possibly have been obtained by theory. Margaret could not determine whether this system were right; but one thing seemed certain, that her own was wrong; at least, if it were necessary, as her uncle seemed to consider, to put so great a value upon the English Church. It was not easy to estimate it very highly, whilst its influence extended but to one day in seven. She was still thinking upon the subject, when she reached the door of the cottage: it was half open, and Margaret heard angry tones raised in answer to the whispers of the sick girl. At such a moment it was unpleasant to enter, yet further altercation might perhaps be saved by the presence of a third person, and Margaret knocked for admittance. Mrs. Newbolt's voice softened as she said, "Come in;" but her face still wore an appearance of great indignation when Margaret appeared; and in her hand she held a cross

and a rosary, which she had just taken from her daughter. Rhoda glanced at Margaret, as if entreating her forbearance, and her mother believing that she had gained a willing listener, again broke forth in a torrent of words, loudly abusing her child, and all who had perverted her, and threatening vengeance upon every one whom she could discover to have countenanced her change of religion. Father Andrea and the Countess Novera were not spared; and texts of Scripture were quoted against them, with a vehemence which frightened Margaret, and made her seriously uneasy for Rhoda. The poor girl's expression and manner, however, showed that she was now too much accustomed to similar scenes, to be deeply affected by them. She kept her eyes shut, and only once opened them, and gave a sign of consciousness, by pointing to the rosary which Mrs. Newbolt had thrown upon the table, as if entreating that Margaret would take possession of it. This was done, under the pretence of examining it; and when, at length, Mrs. Newbolt was tired, and a little ashamed of her violence, she left them, scarcely wishing Margaret "good morning," and declaring that "these things flustered her so, she quite forgot that she had business in Staunton." Margaret was rather uncharitable in her condemnation of the woman. Her own unconscious leaning towards Romanism made her forget the form which its tenets must assume in the view of an ultra-dissenter — very conceited, and extremely ignorant; and she thought of her merely as being bigoted and cruel. "This is very sad for you, Rhoda," she said, kindly approaching the suffering girl, who seemed relieved from a great oppression when her mother was gone: — "does it happen often?"

"Oh yes, every day nearly; but never mind, Miss Percival, I shall not have to bear it long."

"But only for once it is very bad for you," said Margaret. "You are looking quite worn out."

"And feeling so too," began Rhoda; but a violent fit of coughing interrupted her, and Margaret was a little alarmed at being left with her alone. The cough by degrees subsided, and Rhoda's first words then were an entreaty that Miss Percival would not hasten away. "If I cannot talk I can look at you," she whispered; "and I seem safe then."

Margaret sat down, and again taking up the rosary, looked at it attentively.

"It helps me at my prayers," said Rhoda.

"That is what I cannot understand," observed Margaret. "What can the exact number of prayers signify? It is the heart which we ought to think of."

Rhoda seemed hurt, and answered, "I don't know. The priest told me what to do."

"And so you never worry yourself about your prayers?" inquired Margaret.

"I try to say them right," replied Rhoda.

Margaret could not ask for an explanation of this sentence, for every word which Rhoda spoke was an effort. It occurred to her that it might be a help to have some rule for her prayers, but she was not sure that all which suited Rhoda would suit her.

"Have you a book of prayers?" she asked.

Rhoda tried to lean forward, and cast one of her quick glances round the room, and then feebly moving the pillows at the back of her chair, drew forth a volume of devotions. Margaret took it eagerly, but was rather shocked by its contents. The expressions were very different from those which she had read in the volumes lent her by the Countess. They were very familiar, and savoured of irreverence; and the addresses to the saints and

the Virgin Mary she could not in the least enter into. Rhoda watched her carefully whilst she turned over the pages, and once whispered — "Very beautiful!" Margaret made no observation till she had satisfied her curiosity, when she said — "And this book is a comfort to you?"

"The greatest — better than all."

Margaret wondered, and then reproached herself. She fancied that it must be a want of fervour which made her take offence at the peculiarities of the book; and it did not strike her that the inspired prayers in the Psalms, and in other portions of the Bible never jarred upon her; or that the petitions of our Lord, when offered in the extremity of agony, or given as a model for his disciples, were even awfully calm in their expressions. She would willingly have conversed a little upon the subject, and especially have made some inquiries as to the addresses to the saints; whether they were enforced, and in what sense they were used; but Rhoda was too much exhausted to continue talking. One question, however, Margaret could not help asking.

"You cannot pray always, Rhoda; and you must want something to occupy you; what do you read?"

"Stories out of the Bible and lives of the holy saints," replied Rhoda; "but I cannot do it often, because mother would see."

"So you have a Bible?" said Margaret.

The girl shook her head. "They tell me I had better not; I shall get wrong notions again. Mother reads the Bible!"

To Rhoda's mind the last argument was conclusive; and there was certainly something plausible in the inference which she evidently drew from the fact, that her mother read the word of God only to pervert it; whilst Margaret could not perceive the

difference between reading the Bible under the guidance and interpretation of the Church, and reading it by the light of our own individual judgment. There were many contending feelings in her mind as she parted from poor Rhoda. Interest, compassion, and admiration of the sick girl's piety, —distrust, inspired by a long established belief that the Romish faith was unsound; and a dawning suspicion that some truth might be hidden beneath what at first sight appeared to be unmixed error. When with Mr. Sutherland, Margaret's judgment was allowed its full scope, and she could see, or at least fancied she could see, truth clearly; but when absent from him her old habit of mind returned, and she was inclined to arrive at conclusions without sober reasoning. That half hour spent in Rhoda's cottage had in a degree neutralized the effect of the two previous conversations, and her mind was again alive to the excellencies, and partially blind to the defects, of Romanism. Because Rhoda was so in earnest, and found such comfort in her book of devotions, Margaret began to regard it rather as a fault in herself, than in the style of the prayers, that she could not enter into them. She measured them not by an external standard, but by their effects upon a suffering enthusiastic girl. Because the prayers did good, therefore they were good. It was the former fallacy arising in another shape. The park of Henningsley lay before her as she left the cottage. Deserted as it now looked, the thoughts which it recalled were too much in unison with her train of ideas for her to resist the wish of crossing it; and, leaving the high road, she entered it, and sauntered slowly along, pondering upon her last interview with Father Andrea, and the arguments by which Mr. Sutherland (though unconscious of what he was doing) had combated the

inferences that had been drawn from the labours of the Jesuits. Margaret loved her uncle truly; but when she compared the different conversations held with him and with Father Andrea, the interest they had excited did not appear equal. On one side there had been suggestions, half-revealed opinions, facts stated, from which she was to gather her own conclusions; on the other, a sober, hard-lined, unpoetical mode of argument, which appeared to accept nothing as truth that could not be proved to demonstration. To support Mr. Sutherland, there was the deserted church, the neglected village, and the painful sense of weakness in Margaret's own heart; to support Father Andrea, there was a visible power ruling the actions, if not the consciences, of the largest portion of the Christian world, and the exquisite vision of the Countess Novera, embodying all that the most refined imagination could picture of feminine beauty and spiritual excellence. Margaret looked at Henningsley, and for the first time wished that she had been born a Romanist. The sound of children's voices broke suddenly upon her ear. Philip was standing on a little hillock, loudly calling her name. He ran towards her, followed slowly by Mr. Sutherland and the two little girls. Margaret's heart smote her. The thought which had been in her mind! How would her uncle have approved it?

"We knew we should find you somewhere about here," exclaimed Grace, running up to her. "I told uncle Henry that I was sure you were gone to see the Roman Catholic girl."

Margaret blushed, and answered,—"What do you mean by Roman Catholic? How do you know she is one, Grace?"

"Miss Debrett says so; and her maid Susan is a sister."

"There is no doubt of the fact, you see," observed Mr. Sutherland; "but is there any particular reason why it should not be known?"

"The poor girl's relations are mostly Baptists," answered Margaret; "and they scarcely allow her to confess her real faith."

"Miss Debrett says Roman Catholics are very wicked," exclaimed Philip; "so, Margaret, you ought not to go and see them."

"I wish Miss Debrett would not talk such nonsense," replied Margaret. The words were uttered in the sharp tone of some months previous, and Margaret knew it, and was vexed with herself and ashamed. "It is trying, is it not," she said, in an under tone to her uncle, "to have one's endeavours to make the children sensible all ruined by such foolish observations?"

"Not quite ruined yet, we will hope," he replied. "But about this poor girl, — is she very ill?"

"Yes, there is no chance for her, as far as we can humanly judge."

"And do you see her often?" inquired Mr. Sutherland.

His tone struck Margaret as if he were considering whether there was any danger in her doing so; and the question had for an instant arisen in his mind; but it seemed hard to debar the suffering girl the assistance of a person of her own sex, and Margaret's manner was too simple to awaken his fears. Margaret's reply was that she went there about once a week.

"I have never been thrown with Romanists under such circumstances," said Mr. Sutherland; "there were two in my last parish, who died, but they never would allow me to approach them."

"This case is a very interesting one," observed Margaret, "and strange to me: the state of mind

is entirely different from what one is accustomed to see — or hear of, perhaps I ought to say — for I have never watched a death-bed before."

"I should like, for many reasons, to be in your place," said Mr. Sutherland. "It might help to solve some problems in my own mind. But how can a Romanist endure your presence at such a time?"

"I am almost her only friend," replied Margaret, "and I listen to her, and do not argue."

"And you think that she is happy?"

"Very, generally speaking. She seems to have thrown off the sense of individual responsibility, and to rest upon confession, and absolution, and being a member of the true Church. Upon that point I could envy her."

"You are a member of the true Church," said Mr. Sutherland.

"So I may be; but the knowledge does not give me the certainty of salvation."

"Was it ever intended that it should?" said her uncle. "Is there any thing more than a steadfast hope granted us on this side the grave? Even St. Paul dared not speak of certainty until the closing years of a life of great trial; and he tells his converts to 'work out their salvation with fear and trembling.'"

"Romanists think a great deal about the Church," said Margaret; "it seems to form a part of their very existence: and their confessors guide them so correctly, and give them such minute rules for conduct. In those things also they seem very different from us, and their religion seems a greater help to them than ours can be."

"Than ours is, you should rather say," replied Mr. Sutherland; "and yet in a certain degree you

are right. There are more minute rules given for the conduct of a Romanist than for ours."

"And do you not think this desirable?" inquired Margaret.

"Did you ever see a child in a go-cart?" inquired Mr. Sutherland. "It is an admirable support; what should you say if we were to use go-carts all our lives?"— Margaret laughed. — "You laugh," continued her uncle, "because you see at once that we were all designed to run alone. Are you sure that it may not be just as unwise, as contrary to the order of Providence, to put the mind in a go-cart, as it is to put the body?"

"The mind is weak all our life," said Margaret, "the body is not."

"Granted at once; and it should be treated as weak, by having sticks, and props, and outward helps."

"And where are the outward helps to be found in the English Church?" inquired Margaret.

The answer was not then given.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A FLY was stopping at the Grove gate,—and a slight, handsome-looking youth, just verging upon manhood, alighted from it. His complexion was pale, and his black eye sparkled brightly; but there was a greater appearance of health and strength than is commonly associated with such a form and countenance. Margaret ran towards him in delight — a feeling, how different from that which she had experienced upon seeing Craven! and Mr. Sutherland looked very happy; and the servants came out to greet Mr. George, and to express their pleasure at his return.

"We thought you were not coming at all this time, sir," said Symonds, taking up his carpet-bag, and stopping to look at him again before he proceeded to carry it up-stairs.

"That was because I was coming for such a long time, Symonds," replied George; "you will have enough of my company before I leave home again."

"Then you are not going away again, ever?" said Philip, clapping his hands.

"Not if I can help it, until Easter, to Oxford. But where is my mother?" And, escaping from the children, George hurried to the drawing-room.

There are some persons who seem to bear about with them a perpetual sunshine; let them arrive when they will, or how they will, under whatever circumstances, in whatever mood of the family

mind, their place in the home circle is always ready for them. They occupy it so fitly, so pleasantly, the aspect of affairs so changes under their influence, that we wonder at the insensibility which could induce us long and patiently to bear with their absence. When George had told his tale, that the friend with whom he was staying had been called away from home by the illness of a relation, — and had thus accounted for his return before he was expected; when he had made all due inquiries respecting every body and every thing; when he had walked round the apartment, to see that the furniture was unaltered; and, at last, had gone to his chamber to dress for dinner, it seemed quite natural to have him in the house. No one said "What shall we do, or how shall we manage, now George is come?" No one felt "put out." His room was ready for him, his seat was wherever it might be most convenient, his occupations were those which caused no interruption to any one; the only observable difference was in the general tone of the family. George Percival thought his home a very happy one; his father kind, his mother affectionate, Agatha beautiful, Margaret delightfully clever and agreeable, and the little ones pleasant playthings. And no wonder! home cares were not for him; they were Margaret's especial patrimony; and where George was present Margaret's heart insensibly grew lighter. Only a year's difference existed between them; but George was the younger; a boy when his sister was a woman; and she looked at him, in consequence, with something of a maternal as well as sisterly affection. It was indescribably hopeful and cheering to watch the gradual increase of high principles, and the development of superior abilities, in one just entering upon life,

and, as yet, untainted by the sins of the world. George Percival had faults of thoughtlessness, hasty judgment, impatience at disappointment, and a slight propensity to satire, which he shared in common with his elder brother; but they were faults known and guarded against; and Margaret had sometimes penetrated beneath the gay good-humour, that made him the darling of his family, and discovered a spring of deep and holy feeling, which she could little doubt would still guard him from the contamination of evil. When they last parted, whilst her own principles were yet unsettled, she had reverenced her younger brother for motives which did not actuate herself. They met again, and Margaret heard in the gentle tones of his voice, and saw in his thoughtful manner, that he was unchanged, except in having advanced still further in the path upon which he had so early entered.

"He was born to be a clergyman," she said to herself; whilst George was describing to Mr. Sutherland the regret with which he had taken leave of all his old haunts, and his school friends, and contrasting his former life with that which he was about to lead at the University. Even in that short conversation, there was more depth evinced than was common to a person of his age, and Margaret knew that her uncle thought so. A quiet smile of satisfaction was on Mr. Sutherland's face, which Margaret was certain she could interpret rightly.

"And so you have not changed your mind, George, my boy?" said Dr. Percival, drawing his chair nearer the fire, when the ladies had left the dining-room. "You had rather starve on a curacy, than make your fortune in a counting-house?"

"I don't know, sir," replied George, "if it comes to a question of starvation; but my uncle seems to thrive extremely well as a clergyman."

"Your uncle! he is no guide for you. He is a fortunate man; you will never have a living."

"So I was told, George," said Mr. Sutherland, "when I took orders, but it did not deter me."

"And I hope it would not me either," replied George, whilst his colour rather heightened; "I have never wavered in my choice."

"No," exclaimed Dr. Percival, half laughing; "I will give you credit for that. There was never a better example of the firmness — some people, you know, call it obstinacy, — which they say is inherent in the Percivals. However, we won't quarrel about it: if you like poverty, well and good; only, don't ask me to share it."

Dr. Percival turned in his chair, and composed himself, apparently for meditation. George discussed an University life with his uncle, until his father was called away to a patient, and then, growing more unreserved, as he felt himself alone with a friend who could sympathize with and advise him, spoke freely of his future prospects. The Church had been marked out as his profession, from his childhood, and all his wishes had been directed to it. The remembrance had often served to sober his mind, and check his youthful follies; and now that the time was drawing on, when he might hope to enter upon it, all the enthusiasm of his character was directed towards this one point. After the few years, he said, which he must pass at the University, he should, he hoped, be really a clergyman, and then he would study, and labour, and devote his whole energies to his work, and he could scarcely doubt of success. Mr. Sutherland listened with many happy, but with some painful thoughts. They were not hopes which he could bear to crush; but he felt sadly the disappointment in store for them. Perhaps, when experience of the temptations of a

college life had made his nephew more sensible of the dangers which beset his own path, he might be less sanguine in his expectations of saving others from theirs. In the mean time an occasional check was all that could be ventured; and George carried on the conversation cheerfully, without perceiving that a shade of melancholy sometimes passed across his uncle's brow.

"I intend to remain here for two more days, George," observed Mr. Sutherland, when they went into the drawing-room, "and, if you like, we will talk over a course of reading together. Margaret shall guarantee the library free from interruptions."

"Margaret would like to join you," exclaimed a merrier voice than had lately been heard in the family evening party. "I am sure it must be much more useful to have sensible conversations with clever men than to give instruction in the school-room."

"That depends — but we shall talk Latin and Greek; and what will you do then?"

"Margaret knows Latin," said Harriet; "she hears Philip his declensions every day."

"And verbs too," observed Margaret laughing. "I could say them very well once; but I have given up all hope of being learned, uncle Henry, since a certain grave conversation I had with you. It damped my spirit; and besides, I have no time, now I teach so diligently."

"A libel, Margaret, I protest," said Mr. Sutherland: "to the best of my conviction, I never intentionally damped any person's learned energies."

"Ah! to your conviction, but not to mine. I trace back all my woful fallings off to that one point."

"But what could I have said? I don't remember."

"Oh! that it was all useless, good for nothing in itself."

"In itself; yes, very possibly I said that. There is the greatest difference between making study a means to an end, and making it the end alone."

"You must not imagine, though," said Margaret, "that I was humble enough to give up study because you cast a slur upon it. I have gone on still, Germanizing and Italianizing, and reading all sorts of things; but there is a want of some incentive, — such a one as George will have when he goes up to take his degree."

"Don't wish for that, Margaret," said George; "it makes me ill now to think of it."

"Yes, but I do. I do not mean that I have any craving for distinction. I do not wish to take a first class, or make myself remarkable in any way; but it would be a satisfaction to feel that study was a duty."

"The ten talents, Margaret," said Mr. Sutherland, in a low voice.

She turned round quickly, and answered, "They mean every thing."

"Yes, every thing, — of course, then, including mental powers."

"But to labour without a prospect of being useful in consequence," began Margaret.

"Or to wrap our talents in a napkin," continued Mr. Sutherland.

Margaret smiled upon him affectionately, as she replied, "I could study for ever, if it were to please you."

"And you will study for ever, though not to please me, my dear child, I am sure, if it is right."

"I can feel with you, Margaret," exclaimed George. "I don't think I could possibly exert myself to the utmost, if it were not for some visible purpose."

Then, seeing that Mr. Sutherland was silent, he added, laughing —

"My uncle thinks we are two wrong-headed individuals; but he is determined not to put us right."

"Margaret tells me I am fond of lecturing," said Mr. Sutherland.

He took up a book, and asked Harriet to play to him; a request which caused a little disturbance, for Harriet was frightened at being asked to play before any one—even before her uncle Henry, who always spoke kindly, and thanked her, and begged her to go on, just as if he really enjoyed hearing her.

George stood by the mantel-piece deep in thought, and Margaret prepared to make tea; and after tea came music, and a game of chess between Mr. Sutherland and his nephew; and, as usual, some plans for the next day from Mrs. Percival, including a walk to Ashington, that George might become better acquainted with his brother-in-law.

"You are not going just yet," said George, stopping Mr. Sutherland, as he was wishing him good night. "Margaret and I have both one question to ask you. We must have an end to our conversation."

Mr. Sutherland looked doubtful if he were in earnest.

"Then it shall not be a lecture, Margaret," he said lightly; "only a very short exhortation."

"Lecture or not, I will listen," replied Margaret.

"Just think, then," said Mr. Sutherland, "of the difference between studying for fame, or money, or even to please your friends, and studying because God has given you certain powers, and willed that you should cultivate them."

"Yes," said George, "that motive must be much

higher than the others; but I would labour to do good."

"Fallacious still," said Mr. Sutherland. "Who knows what is good? — and even if we think we effect it, how can we be sure that we are not mistaken?"

"And women are in general so shut out from doing good by their mental powers," said Margaret; "and yet they possess them."

"Women are not aware of their own influence," replied Mr. Sutherland; "but your observation certainly holds true as to making the doing good a motive for study. It is not a very obvious one with them. There is but one rule which will apply to us all — St. Paul's. I need not quote you the text which says, 'we are to do all for the glory of God.' And so, Margaret, whatever powers I knew that I possessed, I would improve them, because in so doing I should be following the line marked out for me. The use to be made of the knowledge would be an after consideration."

"Obedience," said Margaret with a smile; "your favourite principle."

"Yes, obey, and the reward will come eventually; and if you should ever be shut up in a desert island, with only wild beasts for your companions, and should chance to have saved a library of books, as people always do save wonderful things in shipwrecks, — still study, and study hard. Good night to you both; I hope you won't sit up half the night in consequence of my advice."

The advice was seasonable, and the warning against sitting up half the night not less so. Margaret was strongly inclined to do it, such a new studying impulse seemed to have been given her; and she determined at least to make the most of her brother's stay at home, and induce him to assist

her in the many subjects upon which he would naturally know much more than herself. One false idea works mischief in every thing. Truth had been judged by Margaret according to its effect; duty by its visible consequences. The one notion would have led her into error in doctrine; the other into neglect and indolence in practice. If she had hitherto been saved, it was because the principles were not as yet deeply rooted, and her good sense and upright mind counteracted the latent evil. Had Mr. Sutherland's opinion been carried out more fully, he might have shown her clearly how an original mistake in motive, a belief that duties are duties according as we see their results, must at last, in many cases, end in the adoption of expediency as a rule of conduct; in the same way as the principal errors of the Romish Church appear generally to have arisen from a desire of what is called doing good, instead of simply doing and teaching right. The first impulse of an earnest mind naturally is to obtain power over others for a good end; the next, to think how that power may be increased; — and then comes the temptation to present truth in a plausible, insinuating form; to dress it up; to make it alluring to human frailty; to bend to the infirmities of a fallen nature; to yield to the power of circumstances; until, at length, the moral sense, originally so pure, seems perverted to sanction any act, if only the final object be that of promoting the interests of religion.

Margaret did not thus carry out the train of reasoning which her uncle had suggested, but she acted upon it the very next morning; and instead of looking to her hour's reading merely as amusement, resolved to make it serve a purpose of duty also. She would read still, but not at random, according to the humour of the moment. The

time was to be employed according to some fixed purpose, and the end was to be the cultivation of her mind, because God had given her talents, and would one day call her to account for them.

A slight sensation of envy crossed Margaret's mind as she looked into the library after breakfast, on her way to the school-room. Mr. Sutherland and George had established themselves comfortably side by side; a large folio open before them, and several smaller volumes lying on the table. Mr. Sutherland was talking, and George listening, and Margaret could not help thinking how much more pleasant it would be to stay and hear what was passing, than to proceed to her duties with the children. She half hoped that by good management the lessons might be finished quickly; and so they were; but just as Margaret had given directions for the room being put in order, and had taken up her work-basket to go to the library, she was summoned to the drawing-room.

"Miss Debrett, ma'am," said Symonds; "and my mistress is very busy, and begs that you will go."

The patience and charity which Mr. Sutherland had once deferred inculcating, were at length, as he had then hoped they would be, brought to bear upon the petty trial. Margaret smiled, put down her basket, and obeyed with cheerfulness. It was an invalid day with Miss Debrett; Margaret knew it from the tone of her voice when she first spoke; and not merely an invalid day, but one of depression, and as much irritation as Miss Debrett could feel. She had caught cold, she thought, and she was rheumatic; pain was flying about her, sometimes in her head, and then in her arm or her shoulder. She had not slept more than two hours the last night, and, moreover, she was fretted; one or two things had worried her.

"Not your maid, I hope," said Margaret.

"Why, my love, I can't say no, and I can't say yes, exactly. I do believe, after all, she is a Catholic."

"And what makes you think so?" enquired Margaret.

"A great many little things, my dear. Mrs. St. Aubyn put it into my head. She called yesterday, and when we were talking about Susan, told me she had often seen that young Italian girl at Henningsley stop and speak to her, and she had heard her say that the sisters were extremely fond of each other; so nothing is more likely. I can't imagine, for my part, why Mrs. St. Aubyn takes such a fancy to the Catholics herself; that foreign girl was always driving about with her."

"And is this every thing which has vexed you?" asked Margaret.

"No, my dear, not entirely; but—you must not be angry—Susan talks so strangely, quite impertinently, I tell her sometimes."

"And what does she say?"

"Nothing that is true, nothing at all;—but this is a sad place for gossip; and we were speaking yesterday of Ashington—you know when I can't get out, I am obliged to have Susan about me more, it is so dull else, and then she just amuses me."

"And what had she to say of Ashington?"

"Little enough, my love, and I did not believe her, as I stated at the time; but the people about declare that Agatha and the Colonel are always quarrelling. I told Susan it was very improper in her to repeat such reports, and then she went on to ask if I did not think Mrs. Clive was altered, and looked unhappy; and so I resolved I would come over to-day and enquire about it."

"Indeed, you must not listen to such things," said Margaret, trying to evade a direct reply; "Agatha has been out a good deal lately, and is tired, and that may make her look grave; but some persons always will spread reports in this absurd way, and I dare say Susan is a gossip."

"So she is, my dear, and perhaps I rather encourage her; but I don't know what to do sometimes, my life is very lonely."

Tears stood in Miss Debrett's eyes, and, as she wiped them away, Margaret asked herself whether she had always done the utmost to cheer her solitude. She had very little spare time, it was true; but now and then she might have gone to her instead of following her own pursuits, and the few minutes' cheerful conversation might have given life and interest to the day.

"Staunton is not like some places," continued Miss Debrett; "the weeks go on just alike. My cousin, Anne Duncan, at Eastlake, she is my only first cousin, you know, wants me to go there. She says that I should find it much more comfortable."

"But why?" enquired Margaret.

"Oh! because I could go to church more, and have the clergyman to come and see me. They are very church-going people at Eastlake."

"It might be much better in that way," said Margaret, without considering the interpretation that might be put upon her words. But she was soon aware of her indiscretion.

Miss Debrett's tears increased from a few drops to a burst of grief; whilst she exclaimed at broken intervals—"Yes, I knew how it was, you are tired of me. It is very natural; I don't blame you: very natural indeed."

Margaret was greatly distressed; but her endea-

vours at explanation were met by a repetition of the same sentences, ending with—

"I shall not trouble you long, my love; my poor frame is nearly worn out. Look,"— and she laid her shrivelled hand before Margaret.

"It is very thin," said Margaret kindly; "but I think you would be better if you went out a little more. Won't you take a turn with me now in the garden?"

"No, my dear, thank you. I'm not fit for that," said Miss Debrett, a little recovering herself—"I had better go home."

"Not just this minute," continued Margaret; "stay and take some luncheon. The children's dinner will be ready directly, and George is here. You would like to see him?"

"Ah! dear George! to be sure I should. I like to see any of you, my love: and you don't think Agatha is unhappy?"

"People have no right to talk such nonsense about her," said Margaret; "when mamma can let me drive to Ashington some day, it will make a pleasant change for you to go too; and you can walk a little in the grounds, and see the conservatory; the plants are looking beautiful, though it is so cold."

"It is very good of you, my dear Margaret, to think so much of a poor old woman. I told my cousin Anne that it would not do to go to Eastlake, and leave my dear friends at the Grove."

Margaret was a little alarmed at the mention of Eastlake, and prudently forebore to make any further remarks upon it.—"And you will come down to luncheon, then?" she said.

"No, my dear, not to-day. I am not well enough. Give my love to George, and don't let him think it unkind."

"But if you will not stay here, let me walk home with you," said Margaret; "I shall only be a moment putting on my bonnet and shawl."

"Oh! my love, I could not think of such a thing. You don't mean to say you would take the trouble?"

"I shall scarcely be a minute," said Margaret rising.

"And, Margaret, if you could stay and eat it, I know Susan has a basin of soup ready: I ordered it this morning. Do you think you could fancy it?"

"I shall have nothing but bread pudding, or bread and butter at home," said Margaret gaily; "so I had better accept a good offer;" and she went up stairs.

Miss Debrett little thought of the sacrifice which this trifling act of consideration was to Margaret; how it robbed her of the short time which would have been her recreation after the school-room labours; how it prevented her from having any leisure for her accustomed serious duties, before going out with the children; and, in consequence, broke in upon the hour's study afterwards, and disturbed the plan which had been formed in the morning. Margaret's good-nature was so free from effort that, even when most inconvenienced, it would have been difficult to imagine that she was not following the bent of her own inclinations. Yet good-nature and self-denial did not keep her from temptation. The interview with Miss Debrett was a fruitful subject for meditation, not so much upon the report which had arisen concerning Agatha's unhappiness, (for though extremely annoying and painful, Margaret was not surprised at it,) as upon the position in the world occupied by Miss Debrett herself; advancing in years, lonely, infirm, fanciful, without object in life, and dependent for

her whole happiness upon friends, whom the least unguardedness in expression might lead her to distrust. Miss Debrett was a member of the English Church. Had she been a Romanist, would she not have had more external aid to raise her tone of mind ?

Margaret walked alone with the children that afternoon, for George and Mr. Sutherland were going to Ashington, and then to take a long ramble over the hills, farther than her strength could carry her. There was but little time for thought when the children were near ; but doubts, especially if disagreeable, will come to us through every thing ; and in the intervals of answering questions, and taking care that Grace and Philip did not run into mischief, Margaret repeated to herself an observation of Father Andrea's, which, at the moment it was made, had fixed itself deep in her mind ; "the Catholic Church has also her homes of refuge for women who are left unprotected." "The English Church has none," thought Margaret; "and not only so, but she does not provide for the spiritual wants of persons who might not choose to enter a Society."—It was a very natural belief, especially at Staunton and Deering. Miss Debrett, indeed, had alluded to a better state of things at Eastlake, but Margaret had not enquired in what it consisted.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THERE was a holiday on the following day. Mr. Sutherland begged for it as it was his birthday. Margaret's delight was greater even than the children's, and as the most agreeable way of spending it, she begged to take her drawing and work into the library, if only she could be quite sure that she should not be an interruption. Mr. Sutherland placed her chair near the fire, and George moved the table to the proper light, cut her pencil, and rubbed her colours; and remarked that he was always more inclined to study and think, when persons were in the room who liked studying and thinking also. Mr. Sutherland doubted, and advised him not to try the experiment at college. The conversation proceeded for some time upon points which did not interest Margaret; questions concerning Latin and Greek authors, whose names only she knew. Still it was enjoyable to feel that she might have a quiet morning, free from interruption; and her drawing progressed satisfactorily, while her mind fell into a wandering reverie, taking its tone from the ideas which had of late presented themselves. She thought again of Miss Debrett, and the deficiencies of education, which had made her so dependent for happiness upon outward circumstances; of the Countess Novera, and the different life which she was leading with the gay Lady Anstruther;

and of Father Andrea also, and his pursuits and interests. Unlike they all were; dissimilar to each other, and to herself; yet, she felt they must have much in common.

The Countess would be almost as lonely as Miss Debrett, if living apart from her religion. Her happiness was dead, her hopes were over, the spring of her youthful gladness was dried up; and yet she seemed still to have motives impelling her to exertion. Margaret feared that in Miss Debrett's place, even with her own superior advantages, a love of study, and a taste for accomplishments, she should, like her, sink into a life of listlessness, and one much more selfish. Days would slide by, monotonous, and unmarked: habits of self-indulgence would insensibly be acquired: there would seem to be no reason why she should or should not act in any particular way. The Countess, Margaret believed, lived a life of rule; all Romanists, she had heard, did so; and this was what solitary persons particularly required. "Law and discipline!" — Unconsciously, Margaret sighed, and spoke the words aloud.

"Discipline!" exclaimed George, laughing, "that is the point we are just arriving at; the discipline and rules of the early Church. Were you thinking of them too, Margaret?"

"Not exactly of the early Church," she said; "I leave that to you and my uncle. The rules of the Church of the present day would be sufficient for me, if they were to be found."

"You must go to Rome for them," observed George.

Mr. Sutherland laid his hand upon his nephew's shoulder and said,—"George, you are to be a clergyman of the English Church, are you not?"

"Yes, certainly, I hope so."

"Then suppose we look at her system, not at the Romish."

Margaret put down her pencil, and listened attentively, and George blushed slightly.

"Persons talk so much in these days of the Church of Rome," he replied.

"I know they do, and for that very reason one should be inclined to suspect something unsound in the feeling which leads them to do so. Fashions in opinion are, generally speaking, exaggerations of truth."

"But you don't condemn the Romish system, putting aside the errors?" inquired George.

"I do not wish to speak of it; it is not our business. Let us work out our own fully; and when we are made bishops, and sit in convocation, it will be time enough to think whether it is wise to adopt the customs of Rome."

"But," said Margaret, in a timid voice, "I do not think I quite understand what our system is."

"You are not alone in your ignorance there, my dear Margaret," replied her uncle. "I believe half the people of England judge of the Church according to its actual working."

"If they are like me they do," said Margaret; "and in this place, you know, uncle Henry, it would seem as if the Church had nothing to do with us except on Sundays."

"Then we will try not to think of this place, or of any place," answered Mr. Sutherland. "Let us just see what the Prayer Book teaches us." He took up one, and opened it at the preface. "First we have an account of the compilation of the services, and a statement that 'the godly and decent order of the ancient fathers' having been altered, broken, and neglected, by planting in uncertain stories and legends, with multitudes of responds,

verses, vain repetitions, &c. so that commonly when any book of the Bible was begun, after three or four chapters were read out, all the rest were unread; therefore a calendar has been drawn out, wherein (so much as may be) the reading of Holy Scripture is so set forth that all things shall be done in order. And because of necessity there must be some rules, therefore certain rules are here set forth; and this order for prayer and the reading of the Holy Scriptures 'is declared to be much agreeable to the mind and purpose of the old fathers.' What can be more simple and reasonable apparently than all this?"

"As far as the service itself goes," said Margaret, "I do not think any one can object. It was not that which I meant."

"But as to the use which is to be made of it; — the preface goes on to state, 'that all priests and deacons are to say daily the Morning and Evening Prayer, either privately or openly; not being let by sickness or some other urgent cause. And the curate that ministereth in every parish church or chapel, being at home, and not being otherwise reasonably hindered, shall say the same in the parish church or chapel where he ministereth; and shall cause a bell to be tolled thereunto, a convenient time before he begin, that the people may come to hear God's word and to pray with him.' Now, Margaret, how does your objection, that the Church provides only for the Sunday services stand against this?"

"Practically the same as ever," said Margaret; "it is not done."

"But we are not talking of the practice; our question is with the system and rules. Let the practice be what it may, the fault lies in the neglect of individuals, not in the constitution of the Church.

You must keep this clearly in mind, or we shall never see things in their true light."

"Then you will allow that there are practical evils?" said George.

"Certainly, many and great; but we are not come to them yet. Now observe what follows the preface: A calendar which speaks of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Whitsuntide; seasons of fasts and festivals, besides particular days on which the remarkable events connected with our Lord's birth and life are commemorated, together with the memories of the Apostles, and the Evangelists, the first Martyrs, and the holy Innocents. I am not inquiring whether or not these days are sufficient, but merely showing that the ecclesiastical year is not intended to pass by unmarked."

"Romanists keep such seasons with greater ceremony than we do," said George.

"Allowed; and in many places we do not keep ours at all. Still, I go back to my original proposition, that the Church intended they should be kept, by providing particular services."

"The services alone do not seem sufficient to mark them," said Margaret.

"Have we tried them, my love? We know the peculiar feeling which is attached to Christmas. But the service for Christmas Day does not differ more from the common prayers, than that appointed for Easter Day, Ascension Day, or Whit Sunday. It is custom which makes Christmas Day assume a more distinctive character, and the custom lies in our own power."

"But there is one rule," observed Margaret, "which is forgotten — that which obliges people to fast."

"Not from the fault of the Church," replied Mr. Sutherland. "Here is a table of the 'Vigils, Fasts,

and days of abstinence to be observed in the year.' The Evens or Vigils before the Nativity of our Lord, the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, The Annunciation, Easter Day, Ascension Day, Pentecost, and ten others; also the forty days of Lent, the Ember Days at the Four Seasons; the three Rogation Days, and all the Fridays in the year except Christmas Day; making in all a hundred and twenty-three days to be devoted to fasting and humiliation."

"And the feasts are how many?" said George.

"Eighty-one. That will make two hundred and four days out of the three hundred and sixty-five, set apart for particular observances. I think, Margaret, you will scarcely want more."

"No," answered Margaret; "if they are observed. I don't mean to be pertinacious," she added, gently.

"Only you like to return to the same point, as ladies always do," said George, laughing.

"I can understand Margaret's difficulty," observed Mr. Sutherland. "There is something very startling in this great inconsistency between practice and theory; something which does, at first sight, make one unbelieving as to there being any theory at all; but there is no arguing against facts. There are the words written down; the laws for the daily services, and the proper observance of certain festivals and fasts. We may find more days, George, in the Romish calendar; they may be celebrated with greater pomp; but it is undeniable that the necessity for these outward aids to a devotional spirit is fully recognised in our own." Margaret took up the Prayer Book, and examined it; and in a few minutes afterwards left the room. She was glad that the day was at her own disposal, so that she need not fear interruption, whilst endeavouring

to realize this view of the system of the English Church. It was at first, as Mr. Sutherland had said, startling, from its novelty. Margaret remembered to have read the tables and rubrics as mementos of obsolete customs; a sort of remnant of Romanism, which, at the time the Church was reformed, men were not bold enough to throw aside. She had little imagined that they contained the acknowledgment of a great principle, namely, that as the human being is twofold, the soul and body forming but one man, so the spiritual being requires a twofold aid to bring it to perfection; one derived from the grace received immediately from God, the other originating from the same Divine source, but imparted through the medium of bodily actions and outward observances.

When the body shall be renewed and glorified, when "corruption shall have put on incorruption, and mortal immortality," then will there be no need of fasting and self-denial, and the subjection of the flesh to the spirit. We shall ever dwell in the immediate presence of God, and in His presence will be safety; but, until that time shall arrive, not only must the heart be guarded and watched, but the needs of our frail nature, the daily occurrences, and the common divisions of our life, must be stamped with some visible mark of Heaven, or they will become snares and stumblingblocks in our way, and serve only to increase the fatal blindness which leads us to believe that the business of this world is our all in all. Margaret had lately been groping, as it were, by the dim light of her own reason, after some definite external guide in religion, for she had felt that it was not well either for herself or for others to be living each according to the rule of his own fancy. When she first began to act upon right principles, the want had not been so much perceived;

feeling then had carried her forward, and she was satisfied with having attained a higher ground than that upon which she had originally stood. But as duties and responsibilities opened upon her, and the wonderful facts of the Gospel came out more distinctly to view, all claiming attention, she grew perplexed by a sense of her own infirmity and blindness, and would have rejoiced at the prospect of direction in almost any shape. It had been sent to her now; but in a form which seemed to place any practical benefit at as great a distance as ever. There were the laws, the indications of the particular subjects which were to occupy her thoughts at certain seasons. The year lay before her, mapped and portioned out; but how was she to follow its course? No one that she knew, except her uncle at Alton, attended daily services, or kept festival days; Christmas and Easter excepted. Still less did either her friends or acquaintances think of fasting. One day was exactly like another to them. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, indeed, there were services; but the other distinctions which were made were not worth noticing. And it could not be her part to begin setting the example. Margaret's day of enjoyment, her holiday, appeared likely to produce anything but enjoyment. To become aware of a new duty, and to have no idea how to commence its performance, is a very distressing state of mind, especially when the duty seems likely to attract attention. Once Margaret did heartily wish that she had never said anything about the Church system; that she had not wished to live under rule herself, or thought it possibly good for Miss Debrett. Why had she troubled herself upon such a point? But it was a cowardly thought, and conscience reproached her for it. If the observance of these days were a duty; if it were ordered and she were bound

to obey, she ought on no account to shrink from it. Again she referred to the Prayer Book; but there were still the same words, the only minute direction accompanying them being, that if a feast-day fell upon a Monday, the vigil, or fast-day, should be kept upon the Saturday instead of the Sunday; showing that it was taken as a matter of course that the rule should be adhered to. Margaret remembered the simple way in which the Countess Novera had once, in the course of a conversation, alluded to the fact of its being a fast-day. Such things came quite naturally to a Romanist; but they were great difficulties to a member of the English Church. The comparison, again, placed the latter in a lower position, for Margaret did not recollect her uncle's distinction between the neglect of individuals and the neglect of the Church itself. She pondered upon the matter long, and the luncheon-bell rang before she arrived at any definite opinion. Mr. Sutherland little knew the uneasiness he had caused by his wish to instil Church principles. As a man, he was independent; he might attend daily services, and keep fasts and festivals, and few persons would say any thing about it; or, if they did, he could smile at the observation he attracted, and pursue his own course unheeding. But, with a woman, a young girl, one of a large family, professing no deeper religious principles than those of the world around it, the case was widely different. Above all things, Margaret dreaded to draw upon herself any remarks. Retiring, delicate, and reserved, even had it been praise which was to follow her, she would have found it pain. Her dislike to betraying her most cherished feelings was so great that she had now and then been tempted even to assume a lighter tone than became the occasion, in order to conceal some better thoughts. And were she once to

adopt a strict rule of life, all her principles must be known, and discussed; perhaps argued against. Margaret had often wished herself a man, in order that she might do good on a large scale; now she wished it most earnestly for another reason, — that she might not care for being talked about. And then, if she did determine upon following out the Church rules, how was it to be done? Daily services there were none. Vigils, if they meant sitting up all night, would incapacitate her for the duties of the next day. Fasting she had never tried; but she believed that it would make her extremely ill. The easiest way to solve the difficulty was to determine that the regulations were made for a different state of society, and could not apply to the present day. But three hundred years ago! it was not so very long. Persons lived then in families, and ate, and drank, and slept, and visited; the broad outlines of their lives were the same; yet the Church, when casting aside the errors of Romanism, thought it necessary to enforce definite rules, and evidently did not contemplate the possibility of a departure from them. Margaret possessed a more distinct notion of the Church than formerly, and could not but acknowledge that it had a claim of authority over her, though the idea was still rather an abstract one. She could not set aside its laws as she would once have done; but it certainly was very strange that every one else seemed to do so. Her uncle, indeed, might be an exception. Upon thinking over his mode of life, Margaret had some reason to believe that it was governed according to a stricter law than that of the generality of the world; but she lived at a distance from him, and when they were together she had never watched him narrowly, or tried to discover why he did, or did not do, certain things. Could she ask him the question? or—

which would indeed be better — could she seek his advice as to what would be proper for herself?

Unreserved persons can have little idea of the pain it is to those whose dispositions are unlike their own, to speak upon personal subjects. Margaret would not have called herself reserved with her uncle; she had talked to him freely; they had conversed upon almost every subject which interested her; but then it was in general terms. Where subjects immediately referred to herself, she had implied her feelings rather than mentioned them; and this especially since she had really acted from religious motives. Discussing the fasts and festivals as a question of curiosity, or even philosophizing upon their necessity, was quite another thing from seeking minute directions for her private conduct. Margaret envied the Countess's intimacy with Father Andrea, and was again rather inclined to murmur against her own Church. Perhaps she might have done so less had she considered that the English Church allows, and even commands, in questions of conscience, a free communication between the clergyman and his spiritual charge; and that although the custom has grown into disuse, the cause may arise as much from the fault of the laity as from the omissions of the clergy. In a highly artificial state of society, there must be a great difficulty in finding a middle way between the practice of confession and spiritual direction, as it is carried on in the Romish Church, where the priestly power interposes between the sacred confidence of husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, friend and friend, and the neglect of this particular guidance in the working of the English Church: but the difficulty is not the creation, but the misfortune of the Church, and cannot with justice be laid to her charge. So Margaret did not think then. She felt

that she could have said any thing to a confessor like Father Andrea, especially appointed to hear her; but to her uncle, gentle, and considerate, and judicious though he was, she could not apply; and she said to herself, that the Romish Church would suit her particular disposition much better than the English.

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